

DECEMBER

10¢

QUALITY
COMICS
GROUP
I.C.D.
12

ROMANCES

In This Issue:

GUNSMOKE HEARTBREAK... PETTICOAT LAW...

OUTLAW LOVE... TENDERFOOT SWEETHEART





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GUNSMOKE HEARTBREAK



"CHOOSE!" Del Stuart told the man she loved! "If you buckle on those guns, were through! You'll never see me again, never hold me in your arms, never feel the fire of my kisses! For I swear, I'll never give my heart to a gun-hawk!"

But outside, the gray dust eddied up from the boots of the man who had sworn to kill Race Whitley on sight!

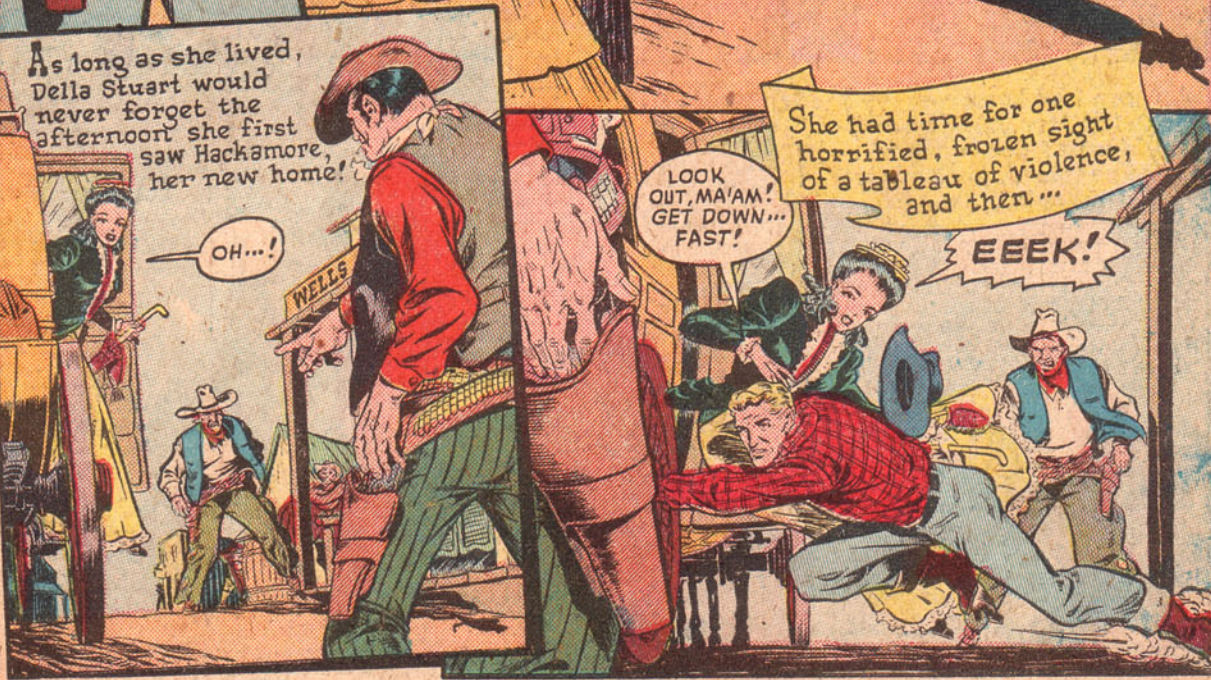
As long as she lived, Della Stuart would never forget the afternoon she first saw Hackamore, her new home!

OH...!

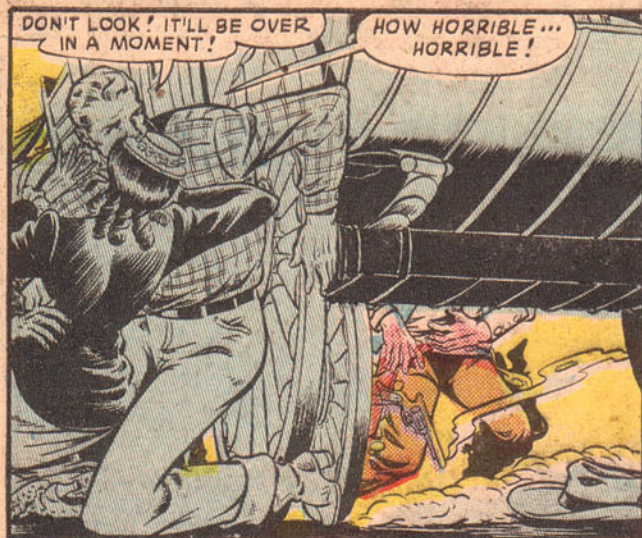
LOOK OUT, MA'AM! GET DOWN... FAST!

She had time for one horrified, frozen sight of a tableau of violence, and then...

EEEEK!



Then, as gun-thunder rocked the sun-baked street...



DON'T LOOK! IT'LL BE OVER IN A MOMENT!

HOW HORRIBLE... HORRIBLE!



THAT CROWD...! DO...DO YOU MEAN A MAN WAS KILLED, SHOT DOWN IN THE STREET JUST NOW, LIKE AN ANIMAL?

I RECKON SO, MISS STUART! WHEN BAT HALEY PULLS IRON, HE DON'T GENERALLY MISS!

A room had been reserved for Del at Mrs. Pine's Boarding House! She let Race take her there, finding comfort in his quiet strength...

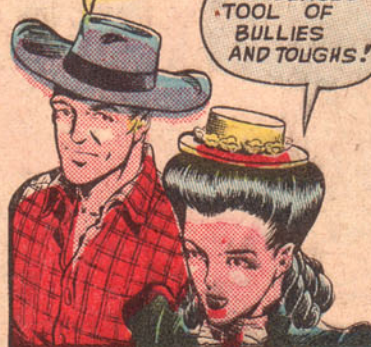


I TAKE IT YOU'RE FROM THE EAST, MISS STUART... ON YOUR FIRST TRIP WEST!

YES! I CAME OUT TO WORK IN MY UNCLE ROBERT'S BANK! HE...HE WROTE ME HOW CIVILIZED HACKAMORE WAS, HOW PEACEFUL!

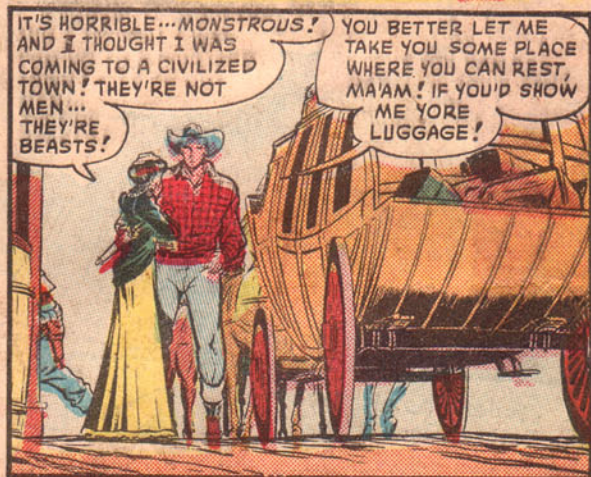
IT GENERALLY IS, MA'AM! BUT A SIX-GUN IS OUR ONLY LAW! SOME DAY IT'LL BE DIFFERENT! YOU'LL COME TO LIKE IT HERE!

I DOUBT IT! EVERY-ONE BUT YOU WEARS A GUN... AND I HATE THE UGLY, MURDEROUS TOOL OF BULLIES AND TOUGHS!



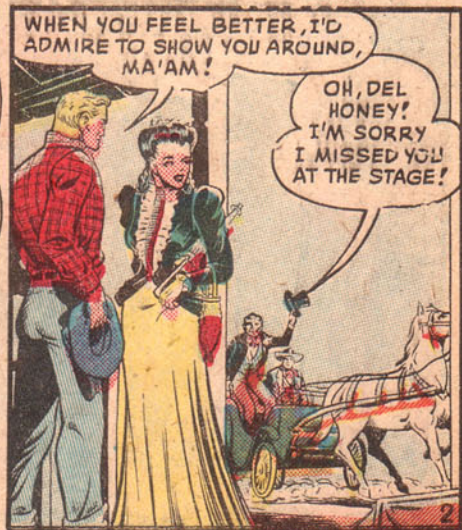
IT'S ALL RIGHT NOW! I'M SORRY IF I WAS ROUGH BUT BULLETS DON'T WAIT! I'M RACE WHITLEY!

THANK YOU FOR PROTECTING ME! I'M DEL STUART!



IT'S HORRIBLE...MONSTROUS! AND I THOUGHT I WAS COMING TO A CIVILIZED TOWN! THEY'RE NOT MEN... THEY'RE BEASTS!

YOU BETTER LET ME TAKE YOU SOME PLACE WHERE YOU CAN REST, MA'AM! IF YOU'D SHOW ME YORE LUGGAGE!



WHEN YOU FEEL BETTER, I'D ADMIRE TO SHOW YOU AROUND, MA'AM!

OH, DEL HONEY! I'M SORRY I MISSED YOU AT THE STAGE!

CLINT AND I WERE OUT
LOOKING AT SOME
CATTLE! I HAD NO
IDEA IT WAS SO
LATE! ARE YOU
ALL RIGHT, HONEY?
HAVE A GOOD
TRIP?

YES, UNCLE ROBERT!
AND MR. WHITLEY
WAS KIND
ENOUGH TO
SEE ME
HERE! TH-
THERE
WAS A
GUNFIGHT
AND HE
PROTECTED
ME!

Del felt her uncle stiffen! As the two men faced
one another, she sensed a coldness between them!

OH, YES! ER... THANKS,
WHITLEY! I'LL TAKE
CHARGE NOW!

DON'T MENTION IT,
MR. STUART! GOODBYE,
MISS DEL!

WAIT... PLEASE! I'LL EXPECT
YOU TO SHOW ME AROUND
THE TOWN AS YOU PROMISED...
RACE! AND JUST CALL ME
DEL!

I'D LIKE THAT! I'LL STOP
AROUND TOMORROW
EVENING,
DEL!

DEL, MEET
CLINT DERWIN!
CLINT'S THE
BIGGEST CATTLE-
MAN IN THESE
PARTS!

CHARMED, MISS
STUART! SUCH
LOVELINESS IS
THE ONE THING
HACKAMORE
NEEDED TO
MAKE IT
PARADISE!

AFTER YOU'VE SEEN THE TOWN
WITH THE... ER... SOD-BUSTER,
LET ME SHOW YOU THE RANGE!
MY BUGGY IS AT
YOUR SERVICE!

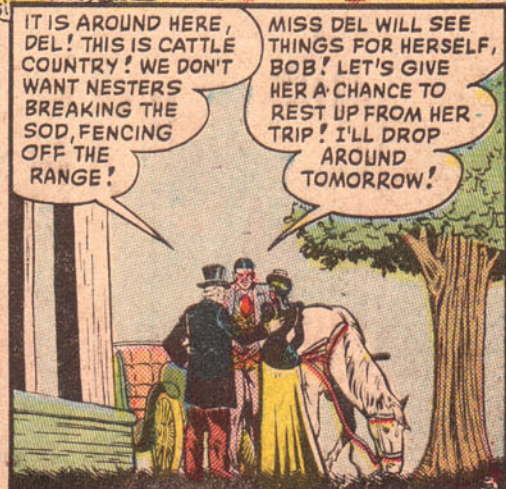
UH... DEL HONEY,
THERE'S A
LITTLE MATTER
THAT NEEDS
EXPLAINING! YOU
WOULDN'T WANT
TO MAKE A
WRONG START
OUT HERE!

IT WOULD BE
BETTER IF YOU
WEREN'T SEEN
AROUND MUCH
WITH THAT RACE
WHITLEY! HE'S
A NESTER... A
FARMER!

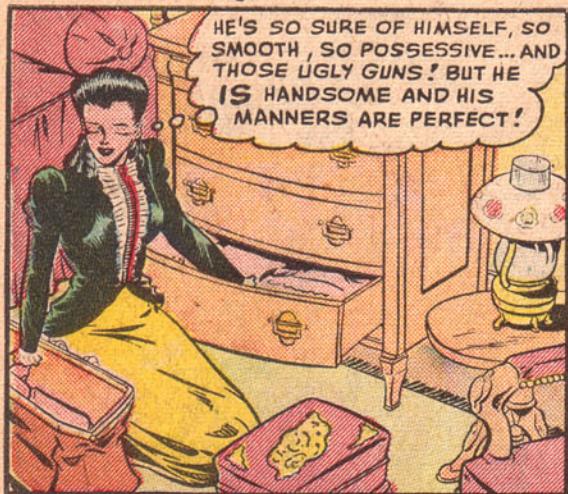
WHAT OF
IT, UNCLE
ROBERT? IS THAT A
CRIME?

IT IS AROUND HERE,
DEL! THIS IS CATTLE
COUNTRY! WE DON'T
WANT NESTERS
BREAKING THE
SOD, FENCING
OFF THE
RANGE!

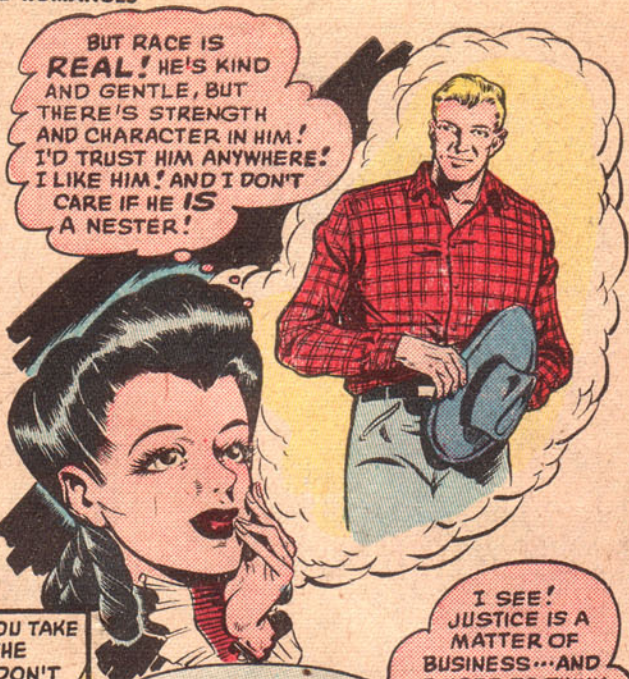
MISS DEL WILL SEE
THINGS FOR HERSELF,
BOB! LET'S GIVE
HER A CHANCE TO
REST UP FROM HER
TRIP! I'LL DROP
AROUND
TOMORROW!



Alone in her room at last, Del felt a shiver of apprehension! She was both attracted and repelled by Clint Derwin!

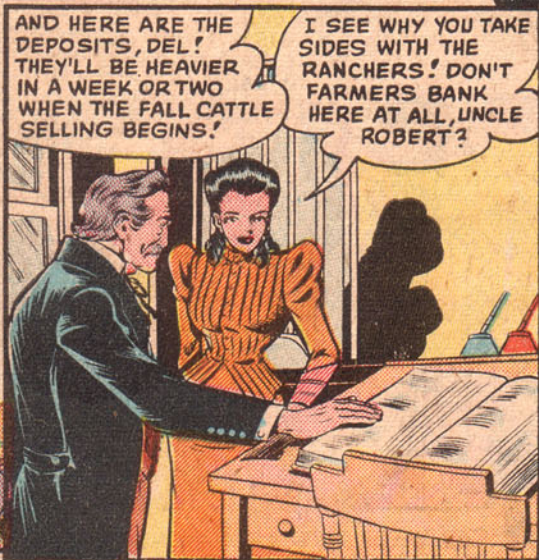


HE'S SO SURE OF HIMSELF, SO SMOOTH, SO POSSESSIVE...AND THOSE UGLY GUNS! BUT HE IS HANDSOME AND HIS MANNERS ARE PERFECT!



BUT RACE IS REAL! HE'S KIND AND GENTLE, BUT THERE'S STRENGTH AND CHARACTER IN HIM! I'D TRUST HIM ANYWHERE! I LIKE HIM! AND I DON'T CARE IF HE IS A NESTER!

The next morning Del began to learn her duties at the bank...

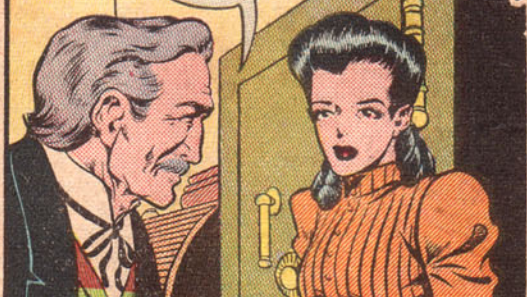


AND HERE ARE THE DEPOSITS, DEL! THEY'LL BE HEAVIER IN A WEEK OR TWO WHEN THE FALL CATTLE SELLING BEGINS!

I SEE WHY YOU TAKE SIDES WITH THE RANCHERS! DON'T FARMERS BANK HERE AT ALL, UNCLE ROBERT?

FRANKLY, I DON'T WANT THEIR BUSINESS! I CAN'T AFFORD TO ANTAGONIZE THE CATTLEMEN...AND THE NESTERS WON'T BE HERE LONG ANYHOW!

I SEE! JUSTICE IS A MATTER OF BUSINESS...AND I USED TO THINK THE WEST WAS A LAND OF FREEDOM AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL! BUT I'M LEARNING!



...AND YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN THE DIRTY NESTER SQUIRM WHEN I LAID MY .44 IN HIS RIBS! HIS OLD WOMAN SCREAMED HER HEAD OFF!

I SAY BURN 'EM ALL OUT! RUN 'EM OUTA THE COUNTRY OR BURY 'EM IN IT! THE ONLY GOOD NESTER'S A DEAD ONE!



AFTERNOON, MISS DEL! LIKE TO TAKE A RIDE AROUND THIS EVENING?

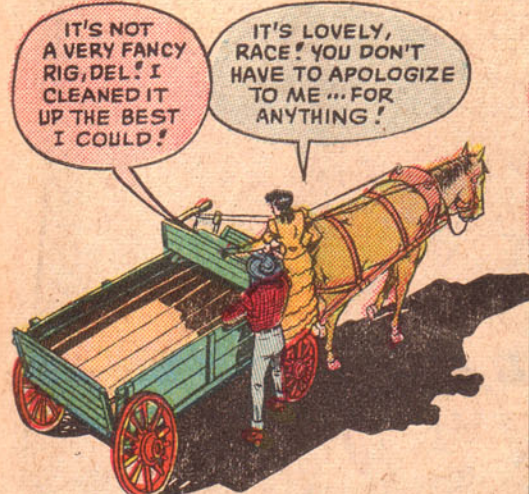
THANK YOU, BUT I'M RIDING WITH RACE WHITLEY TONIGHT, MR. DERWIN! ANOTHER TIME PERHAPS!



I SEE! I JUST THOUGHT YOU MIGHT HAVE CHANGED YOUR MIND! I'LL ASK AGAIN TOMORROW, THEN!

DO THAT, MR. DERWIN!

That evening Del's heart beat a little faster at her coming ride with Race! She could not deny that her interest was more than casual...

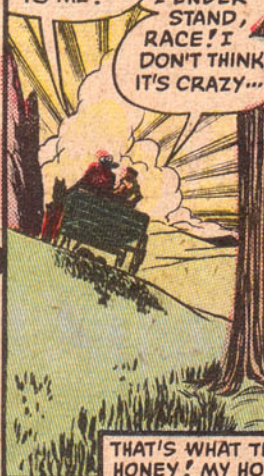


IT'S NOT A VERY FANCY RIG, DEL! I CLEANED IT UP THE BEST I COULD!

IT'S LOVELY, RACE! YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE TO ME...FOR ANYTHING!

MAYBE THIS IS CRAZY, DEL...MAYBE I'M CRAZY... BUT WHEN I SAW YOU YESTERDAY AND HELD YOU IN MY ARMS, SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ME!

I UNDERSTAND, RACE! I DON'T THINK IT'S CRAZY...



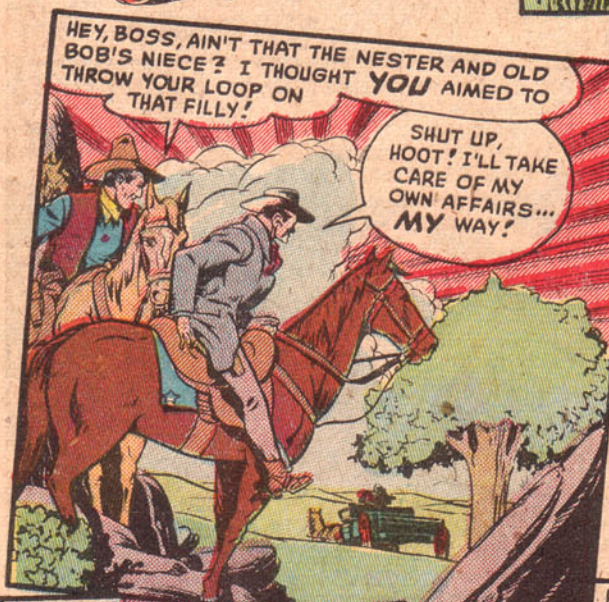
...BECAUSE, YOU SEE, IT HAPPENED TO ME, TOO! SOMETHING NEW AND WONDERFUL THAT NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE!

DEL...! DEL, DARLING!



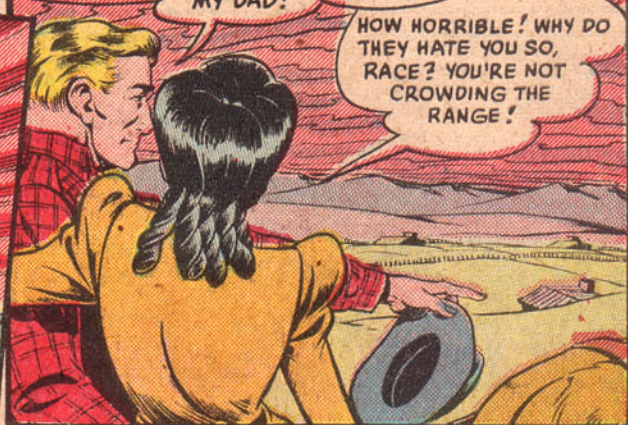
THAT'S WHAT THEY CALL THE NESTER SETTLEMENT, HONEY! MY HOUSE IS THE FIRST ONE DOWN THERE! I'M ALONE SINCE CATTLEMEN KILLED MY DAD!

HOW HORRIBLE! WHY DO THEY HATE YOU SO, RACE? YOU'RE NOT CROWDING THE RANGE!



HEY, BOSS, AIN'T THAT THE NESTER AND OLD BOB'S NIECE? I THOUGHT YOU AIMED TO THROW YOUR LOOP ON THAT FILLY!

SHUT UP, HOOT! I'LL TAKE CARE OF MY OWN AFFAIRS... MY WAY!



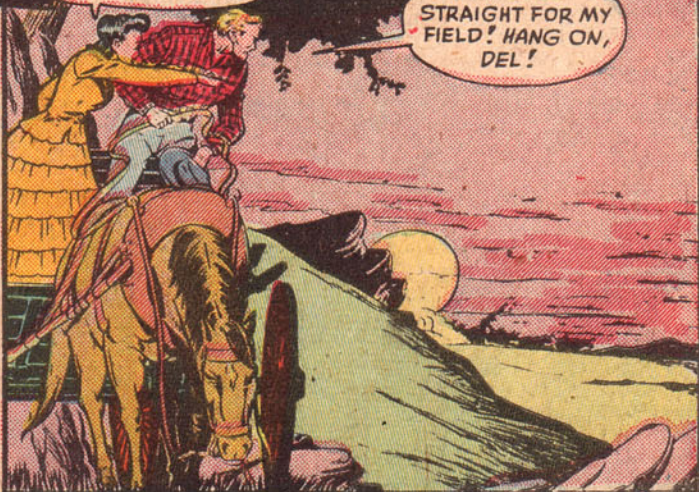
Suddenly Del's ears caught a sound like distant thunder, a low, ominous rumble punctuated by sharper reports!

RACE... LOOK! A BIG HERD OF CATTLE RUNNING!

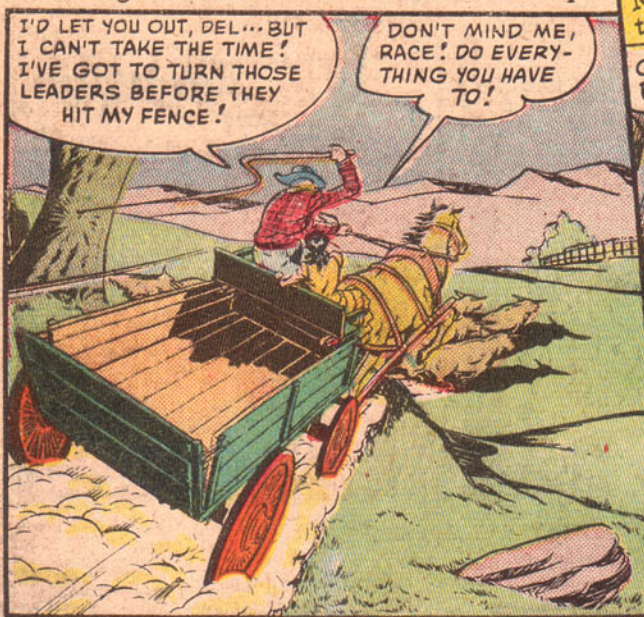
THEY'RE BEING STAMPEDED STRAIGHT FOR MY FIELD! HANG ON, DEL!

THEY'RE AFRAID WE WILL, DEL...AFRAID IF OUR LITTLE GROUP STAYS, MORE AND MORE WILL COME UNTIL THE RANGE IS ALL RUINED!

THAT'S SILLY! I KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT FARMING TO KNOW YOU COULDN'T USE THE OPEN RANGE, ANYHOW! IT'S TOO DRY AND BARREN!



The next few minutes were a nightmare... yet strangely, Del felt no fear! She was too indignant, too concerned for Race's crop!



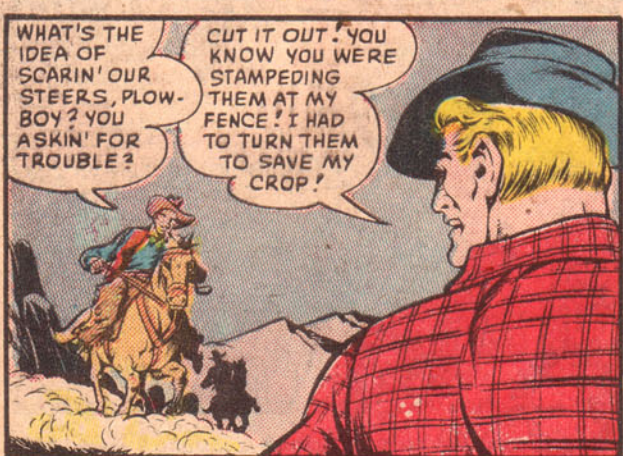
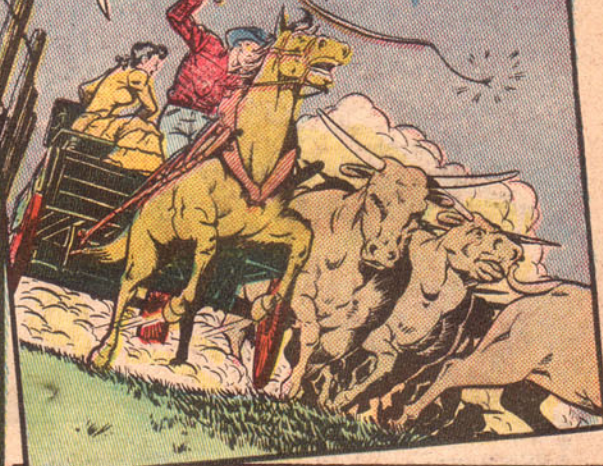
I'D LET YOU OUT, DEL... BUT I CAN'T TAKE THE TIME! I'VE GOT TO TURN THOSE LEADERS BEFORE THEY HIT MY FENCE!

DON'T MIND ME, RACE! DO EVERYTHING YOU HAVE TO!

Moments of wracking uncertainty...and then triumph...

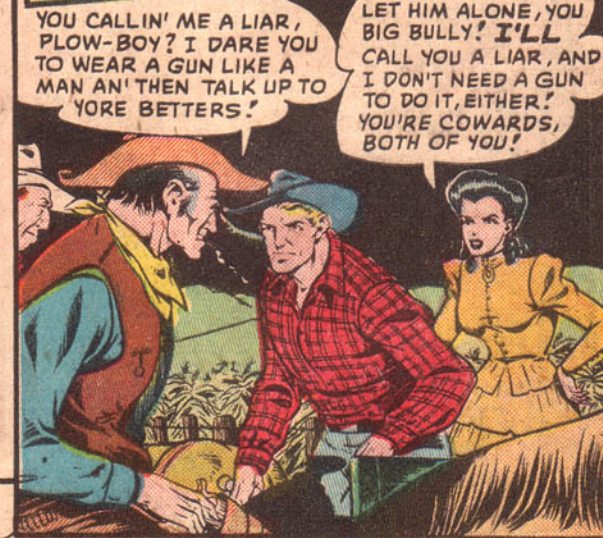
GET! SCAT, YOU BIG UGLY BEASTS! SHOO!

WE DID IT, DEL! THEY'RE SWINGING AWAY FROM THE FENCE!



WHAT'S THE IDEA OF SCARIN' OUR STEERS, PLOW-BOY? YOU ASKIN' FOR TROUBLE?

CUT IT OUT. YOU KNOW YOU WERE STAMPEDING THEM AT MY FENCE! I HAD TO TURN THEM TO SAVE MY CROP!



YOU CALLIN' ME A LIAR, PLOW-BOY? I DARE YOU TO WEAR A GUN LIKE A MAN AN' THEN TALK UP TO YORE BETTERS!

LET HIM ALONE, YOU BIG BULLY! I'LL CALL YOU A LIAR, AND I DON'T NEED A GUN TO DO IT, EITHER! YOU'RE COWARDS, BOTH OF YOU!



WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? WHO...OH GOOD EVENING, MISS DEL! ANYTHING WRONG?

YES, THERE IS. YOUR MEN TRIED TO RUN THEIR CATTLE THROUGH RACE'S FENCE AND NOW THEY WANT TO PICK A FIGHT WITH HIM!

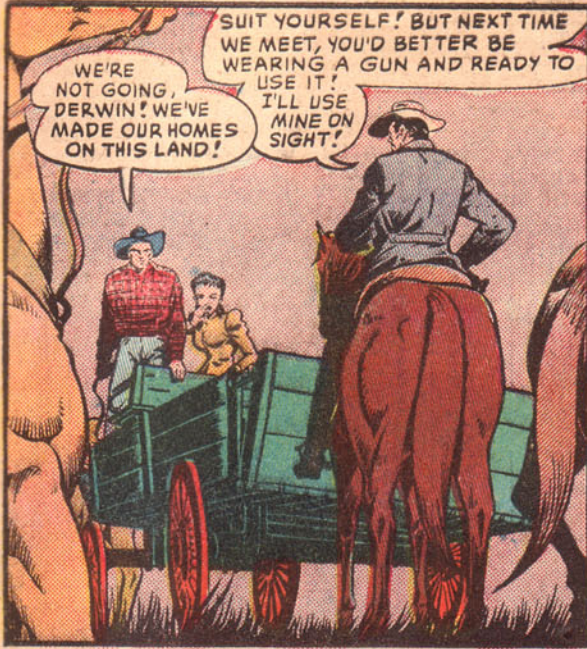


TCH-TCH! I CAN SEE HOW IT MIGHT LOOK THAT WAY TO A STRANGER WHO DIDN'T UNDERSTAND CATTLE BUSINESS! MY BOYS KNOW THEIR JOBS!

I WON'T ARGUE WITH THAT, DERWIN! THEIR JOB WAS TO SMASH MY FENCE AND RUIN THE LAST OF MY CORN CROP!



THERE'S ONE WAY TO STOP ALL THIS TROUBLE, WHITLEY! I'LL GIVE YOU AND YOUR NESTER PALS JUST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY! BETTER START LOADING TONIGHT!



WE'RE NOT GOING, DERWIN! WE'VE MADE OUR HOMES ON THIS LAND!

SUIT YOURSELF! BUT NEXT TIME WE MEET, YOU'D BETTER BE WEARING A GUN AND READY TO USE IT! I'LL USE MINE ON SIGHT!

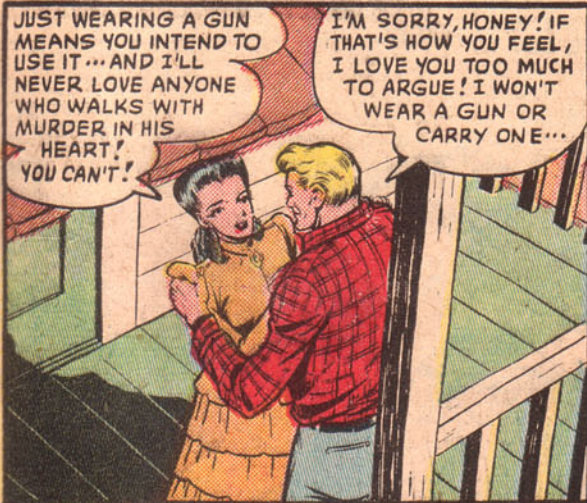


RACE, RACE... YOU'VE GOT TO LEAVE! HE MEANS TO KILL YOU! I'LL GO WITH YOU! THERE MUST BE SOME PLACE WHERE YOU CAN LIVE IN PEACE!

NO, DEL! NOTHING LASTING CAN BE BUILT ON RUNNING AWAY! YOU SEE NOW WHY GUNS ARE SOMETIMES NECESSARY!

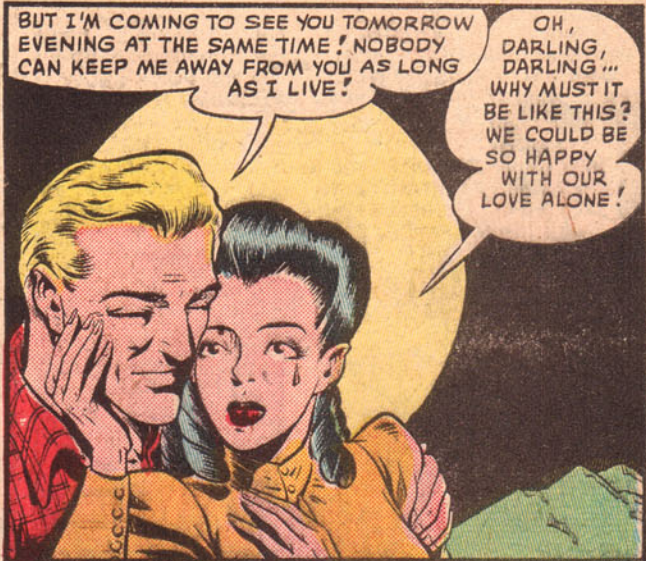
HONEST MEN DON'T LIKE GUNS, HONEY... BUT UNTIL WE GET COURTS OUT HERE, THERE'S NO OTHER ANSWER TO INJUSTICE!

NO, NO! YOU CAN'T, RACE! THERE HAS TO BE SOME OTHER ANSWER! I WON'T LET YOU SET OUT TO KILL OR BE KILLED!



JUST WEARING A GUN MEANS YOU INTEND TO USE IT... AND I'LL NEVER LOVE ANYONE WHO WALKS WITH MURDER IN HIS HEART! YOU CAN'T!

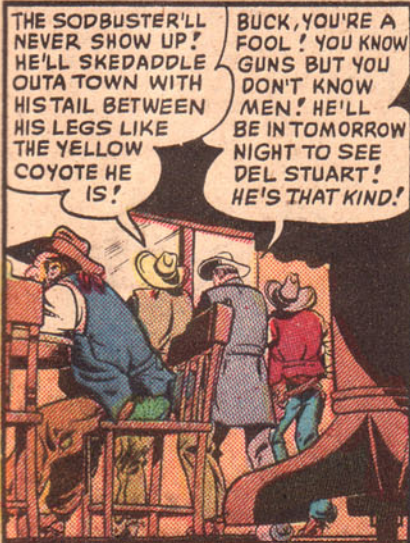
I'M SORRY, HONEY! IF THAT'S HOW YOU FEEL, I LOVE YOU TOO MUCH TO ARGUE! I WON'T WEAR A GUN OR CARRY ONE...



BUT I'M COMING TO SEE YOU TOMORROW EVENING AT THE SAME TIME! NOBODY CAN KEEP ME AWAY FROM YOU AS LONG AS I LIVE!

OH, DARLING, DARLING... WHY MUST IT BE LIKE THIS? WE COULD BE SO HAPPY WITH OUR LOVE ALONE!

At that moment...

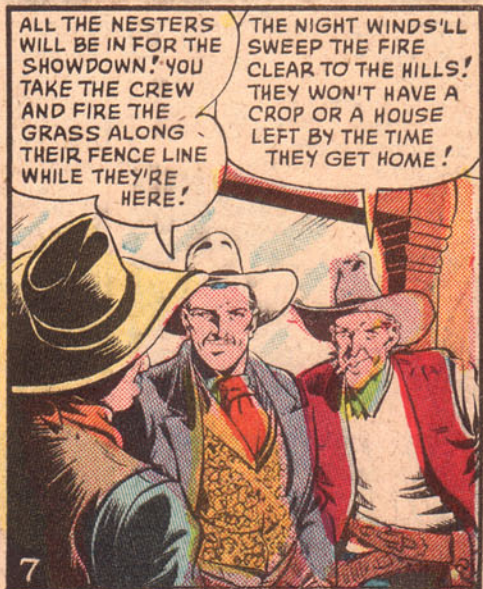


THE SODBUSTER'LL NEVER SHOW UP! HE'LL SKEDADDLE OUTA TOWN WITH HIS TAIL BETWEEN HIS LEGS LIKE THE YELLOW COYOTE HE IS!

BUCK, YOU'RE A FOOL! YOU KNOW GUNS BUT YOU DON'T KNOW MEN! HE'LL BE IN TOMORROW NIGHT TO SEE DEL STUART! HE'S THAT KIND!



HE'LL COME AND WE'LL SETTLE THINGS... **SEVERAL THINGS!** BECAUSE I'VE GOT A JOB FOR YOU WHILE I'M TAKING CARE OF RACE WHITLEY!



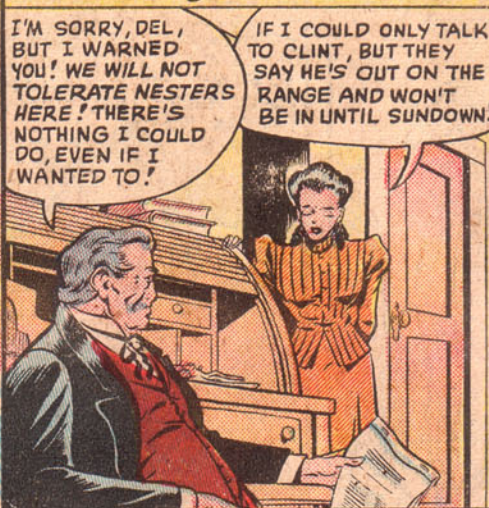
ALL THE NESTERS WILL BE IN FOR THE SHOWDOWN! YOU TAKE THE CREW AND FIRE THE GRASS ALONG THEIR FENCE LINE WHILE THEY'RE HERE!

THE NIGHT WINDS'LL SWEEP THE FIRE CLEAR TO THE HILLS! THEY WON'T HAVE A CROP OR A HOUSE LEFT BY THE TIME THEY GET HOME!

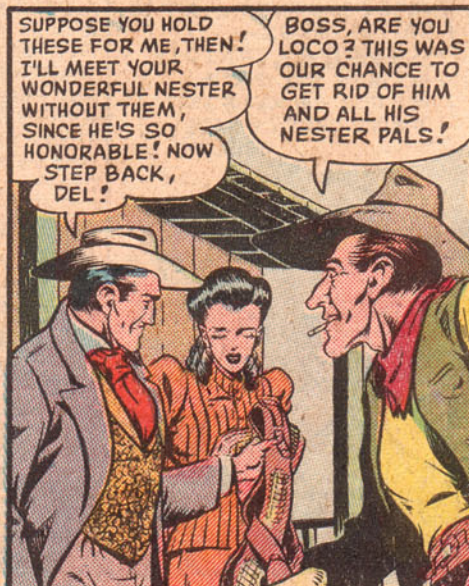
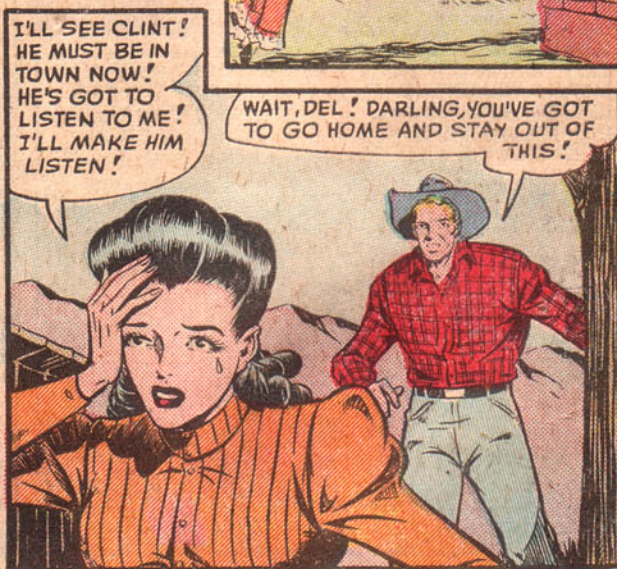
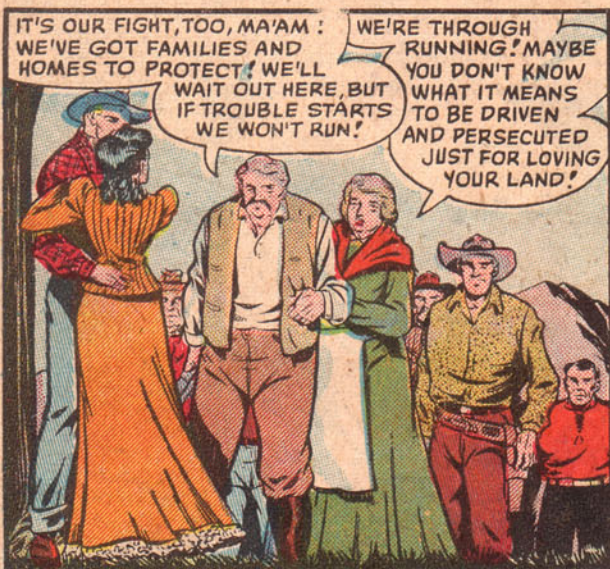
While all through the bitter night...



After a sleepless night, Del sought vainly for help...



Like the clock-tick of Eternity the day wore on and shadows lengthened...



Torn between terror and relief, Del saw the two implacable figures draw together...

And then she saw something else...

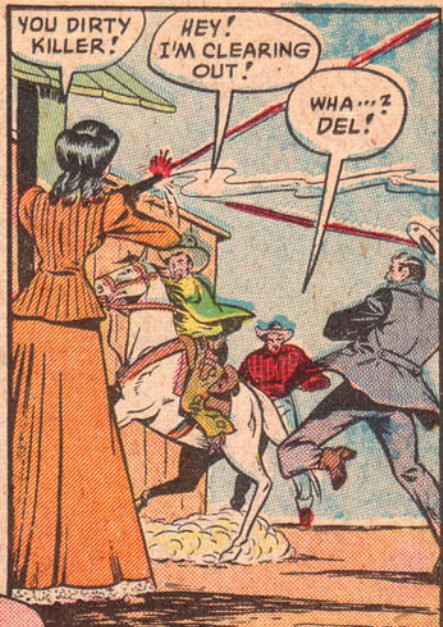
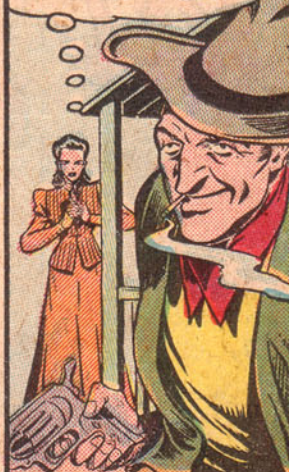
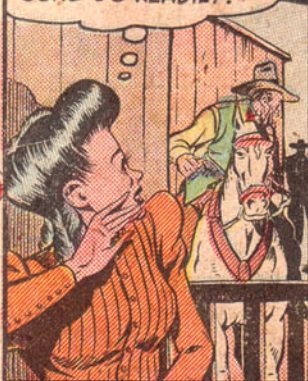
THAT MAN...THE ONE CALLED SLIM! HE'S PLANNING TO KILL RACE FROM THE ALLEY! THAT'S WHY CLINT GAVE UP HIS GUNS SO READILY!

I'VE GOT TO STOP HIM! I CAN'T MAKE RACE UNDERSTAND IN TIME! HE'LL KILL RACE!

YOU DIRTY KILLER!

HEY! I'M CLEARING OUT!

WHA...? DEL!



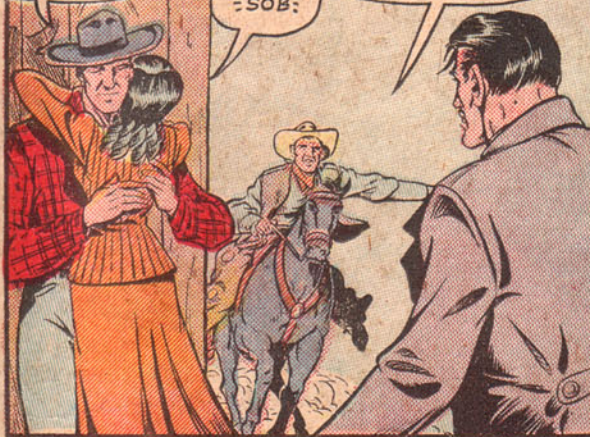
HONEY, HONEY! YOU DID THAT TO SAVE ME!

I HAD TO! SOB!

BOSS! EVERYTHING'S GONE WRONG! THE WIND CHANGED!

THE FIRE SWUNG AWAY FROM THEIR FIELDS! IT'S SWEEPING ACROSS OUR WINTER RANGE! NOBODY CAN STOP IT!

WE'LL LOSE EVERY HEAD OF BEEF! THAT WAS ALL OUR WINTER FEED!



YOU NEEDN'T LOSE YOUR BEEF, DERWIN! WE HAD GOOD CROPS THIS YEAR! WE'VE GOT ENOUGH CORN AND HAY TO WINTER YOUR HERDS...AND WE WON'T OVER-CHARGE YOU!

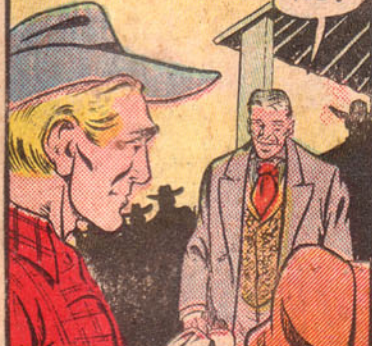
YOU'D DO THAT? YOU'D SAVE MY BEEF AFTER I TRIED TO WRECK YOU?

FOR ONLY ONE REASON...TO PROVE THAT FARMERS HAVE A PLACE ON THE RANGE! BY SAVING YOU, WE'LL SAVE OURSELVES!

ER...THE BANK WILL BE HAPPY TO SERVE YOU, RACE! IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'LL BE IN THE FAMILY, ANYHOW!

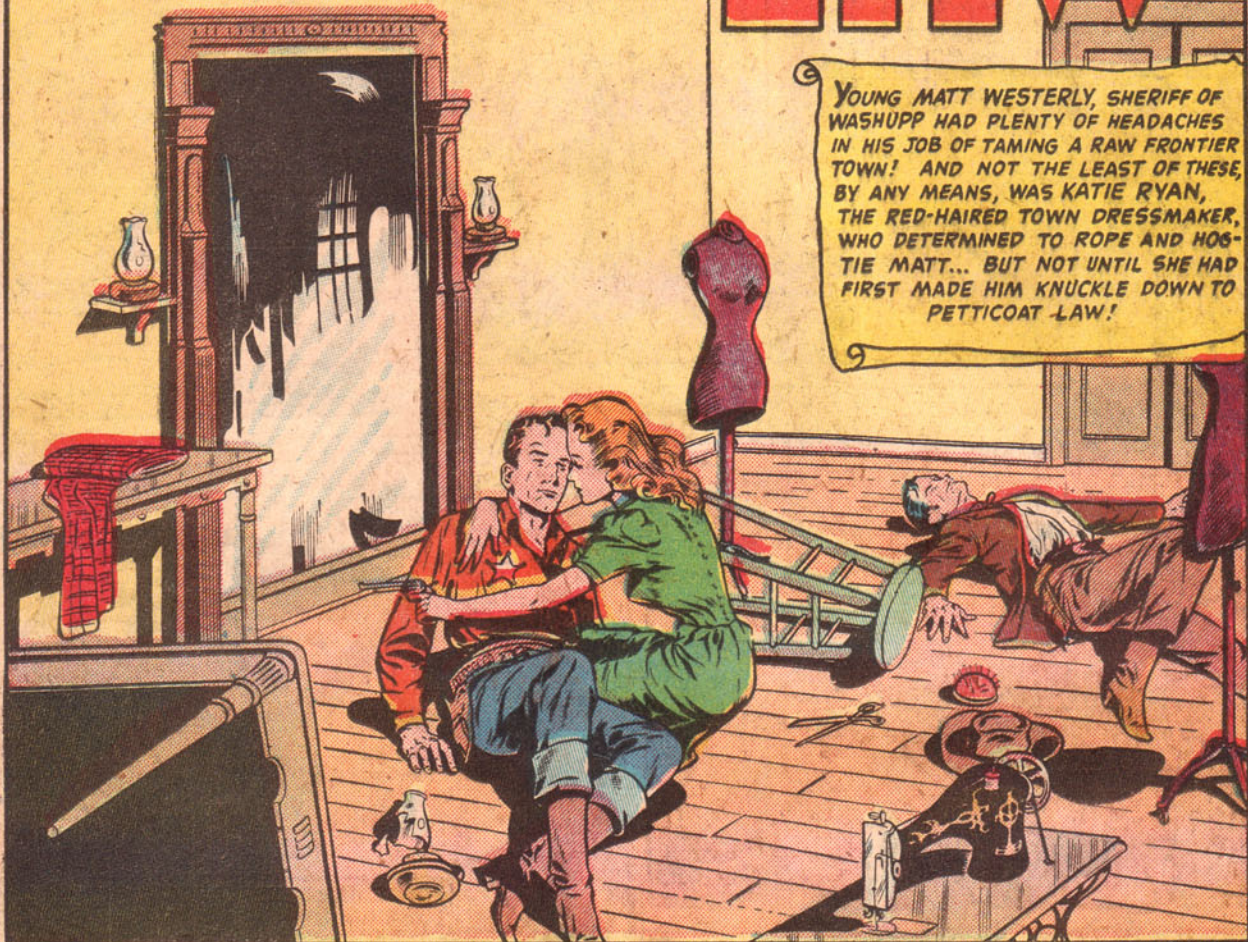
RACE DARLING, WHEN I SAW YOU IN DANGER I SUDDENLY UNDERSTOOD WHY MEN CARRY GUNS! I DON'T HATE THEM ANY MORE WHEN THEY SPEAK FOR JUSTICE!

AND THANKS TO YOUR COURAGE, DEAREST, GUNS WON'T BE NEEDED NOW! WEDDING BELLS WILL BE SPEAKING NEXT... FOR YOU AND ME!



Petticoat LAW

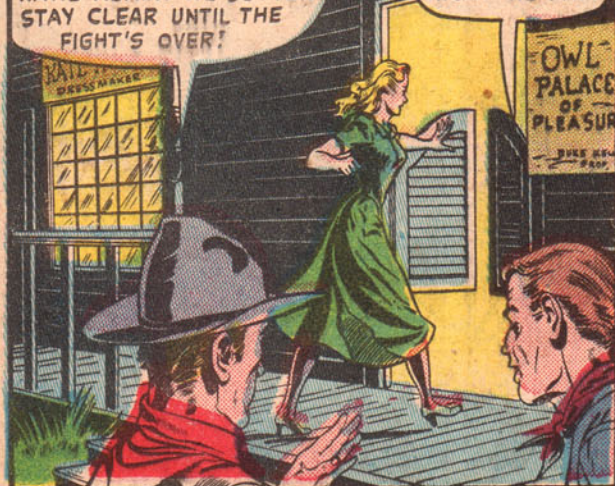
YOUNG MATT WESTERLY, SHERIFF OF WASHUPP HAD PLENTY OF HEADACHES IN HIS JOB OF TAMING A RAW FRONTIER TOWN! AND NOT THE LEAST OF THESE, BY ANY MEANS, WAS KATIE RYAN, THE RED-HAIRED TOWN DRESSMAKER, WHO DETERMINED TO ROPE AND HOSTIE MATT... BUT NOT UNTIL SHE HAD FIRST MADE HIM KNUCKLE DOWN TO PETTICOAT LAW!



KATIE RYAN WAS NOTED FOR TWO THINGS--HER BEAUTY AND A TEMPER AS FIERY AS HER HAIR!

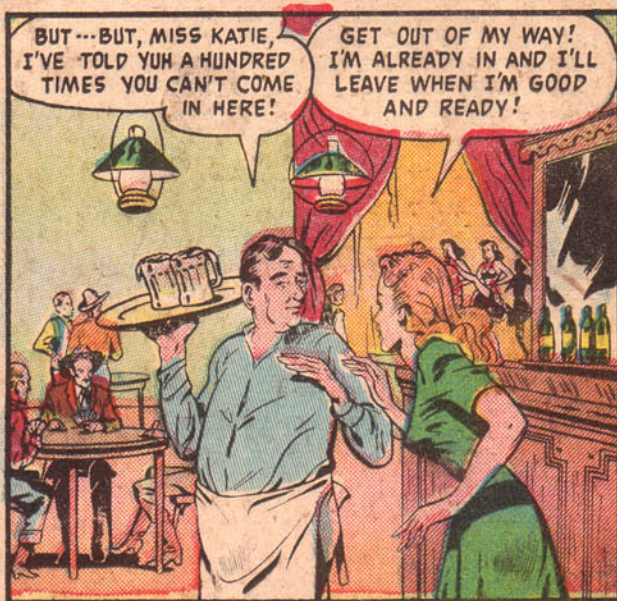
UH-OH! THERE GOES MISS KATIE AGAIN! WE BETTER STAY CLEAR UNTIL THE FIGHT'S OVER!

YO'RE PLUMB RIGHT WE HAD!



BUT...BUT, MISS KATIE, I'VE TOLD YUH A HUNDRED TIMES YOU CAN'T COME IN HERE!

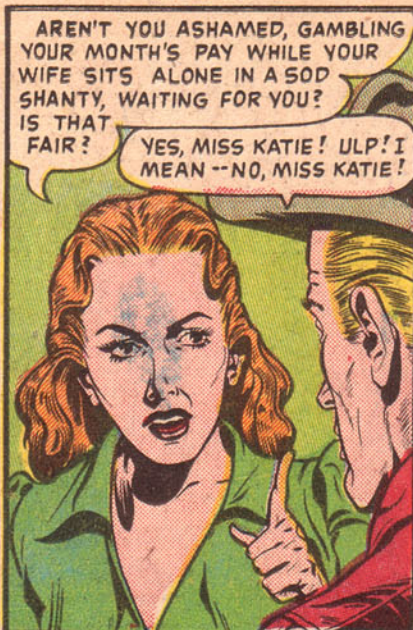
GET OUT OF MY WAY! I'M ALREADY IN AND I'LL LEAVE WHEN I'M GOOD AND READY!





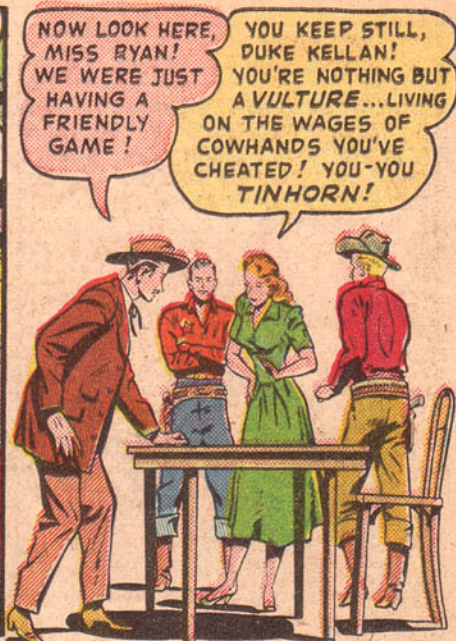
JED WILKINS, YOU GET RIGHT UP FROM THAT POKER TABLE AND GET OUT OF HERE! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

ULP! Y-YES'M!



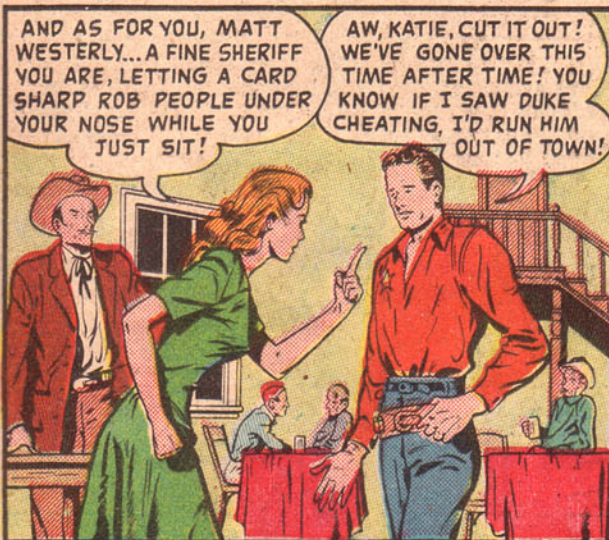
AREN'T YOU ASHAMED, GAMBLING YOUR MONTH'S PAY WHILE YOUR WIFE SITS ALONE IN A SOD SHANTY, WAITING FOR YOU? IS THAT FAIR?

YES, MISS KATIE! ULP! I MEAN --NO, MISS KATIE!



NOW LOOK HERE, MISS RYAN! WE WERE JUST HAVING A FRIENDLY GAME!

YOU KEEP STILL, DUKE KELLAN! YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A VULTURE...LIVING ON THE WAGES OF COWHANDS YOU'VE CHEATED! YOU-YOU TINHORN!



AND AS FOR YOU, MATT WESTERLY...A FINE SHERIFF YOU ARE, LETTING A CARD SHARP ROB PEOPLE UNDER YOUR NOSE WHILE YOU JUST SIT!

AW, KATIE, CUT IT OUT! WE'VE GONE OVER THIS TIME AFTER TIME! YOU KNOW IF I SAW DUKE CHEATING, I'D RUN HIM OUT OF TOWN!



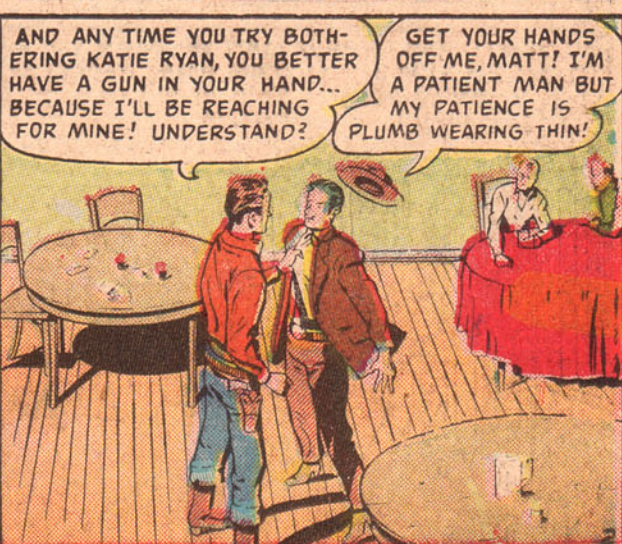
BAH! YOU COULDN'T SEE YOUR OWN HAND IN A GLASS MITTEN! I'M WARNING YOU MEN! EITHER CLEAN UP WASHUPP...OR WE WOMEN WILL!

I'VE HEARD ENOUGH OF THIS...!



EITHER MARRY THAT WILDCAT AND GET HER OUT OF MY HAIR OR I'LL HAVE TO SHUT HER UP MYSELF!

DON'T YOU TELL ME HOW TO SHERIFF MY TOWN, DUKE KELLAN!

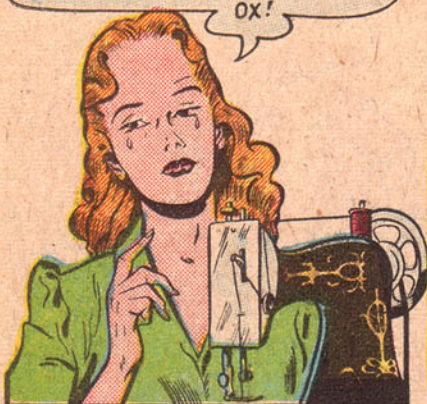


AND ANY TIME YOU TRY BOTHERING KATIE RYAN, YOU BETTER HAVE A GUN IN YOUR HAND... BECAUSE I'LL BE REACHING FOR MINE! UNDERSTAND?

GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME, MATT! I'M A PATIENT MAN BUT MY PATIENCE IS PLUMB WEARING THIN!

BUT KATIE'S ANGER COULD EVAPORATE AS SUDDENLY AS IT BURST FORTH!

NOW I'VE D-DONE IT AGAIN! I MADE A F-FOOL OF MATT IN FRONT OF THOSE MEN AND NOW HE'LL H-HATE ME! AND I DO LOVE HIM SO... THE BIG OX!



BUT HE MAKES ME SO DARN MAD... ULP!



NOW YOU SEE HERE, KATIE RYAN! YOU'VE GOT NO CALL TO GO STORMING INTO DUKE'S PLACE AND...

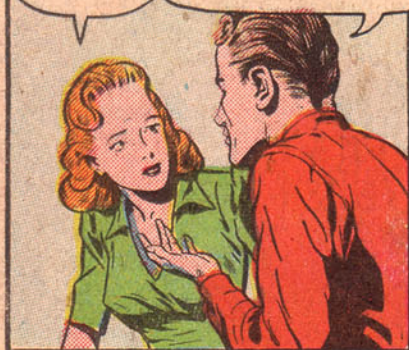
WHY, KATIE, YOU'VE BEEN CRYING!

I-H-HAVE NOT! I J-JUST GOT SOME LINT IN MY EYE! AND EVEN IF I HAD, IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS! GO TEND TO YOUR JOB!



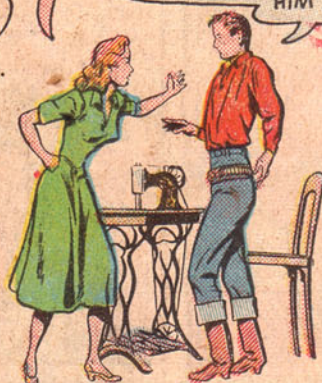
YOU KNOW MIGHTY WELL THAT DUKE KELLAN IS CHEATING AND YOU KNOW HE COULDN'T WIN IF HE WAS HONEST!

RECKON I DO, HONEY! BUT KNOWING IT AND PROVING IT ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS... AND BY LAW A MAN'S GOT TO HAVE EVIDENCE!



EVIDENCE! RUN KELLAN AND HIS DIRTY CREW OUT OF TOWN AND YOU WON'T NEED EVIDENCE ANY MORE!

CAN'T DO IT, KATIE! UNIL I CATCH DUKE BREAKING A LAW, I GOT NO RIGHT TO BOTHER HIM AT ALL!



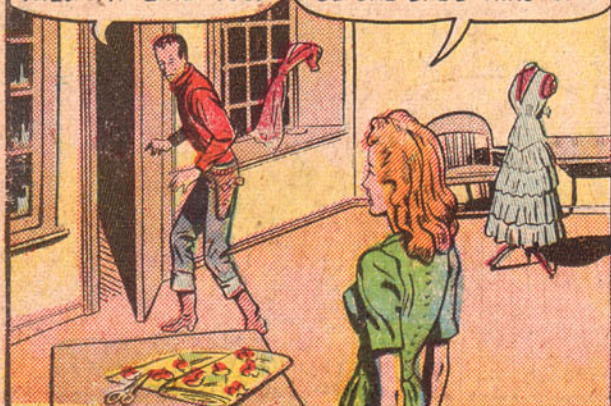
GOSH, KATIE HONEY, YOU'RE PURTY AS A PALOMINO IN THE MOONLIGHT WHEN YOU GET FIRED UP THIS WAY!

SO NOW I LOOK LIKE A HORSE, DO I? GET OUT OF HERE, YOU--YOU...



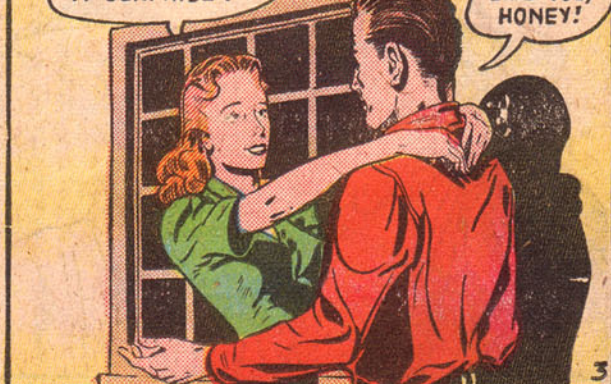
ALL RIGHT! SOMETIMES I THINK I'M PLUMB LOCO TO DREAM ABOUT HITCHING UP WITH A WILDCAT LIKE YOU!

MATT WESTERLY, YOU COME RIGHT BACK HERE! WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY WALKING OUT ON A GIRL BEFORE SHE'S THROUGH?



YOU BIG, CLUMSY, STUPID, PATIENT, WONDERFUL JUG-HEAD! YOU NEVER TOLD ME YOU DREAMED OF MARRYING ME! IS IT A SURPRISE?

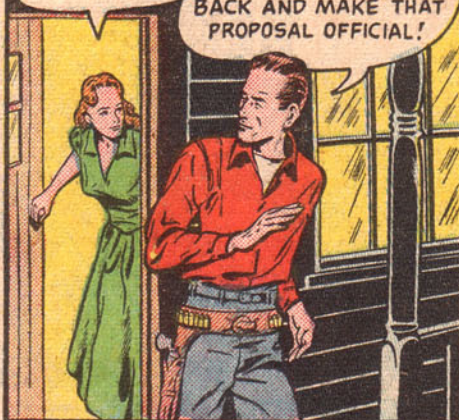
DAWGGONE, NOW YOU GOT ME ALL CONFUSED! BUT I RECKON A MAN'D BE LOCO NOT TO WANT TO MARRY A PURTY GIRL LIKE YOU, HONEY!



SO KATIE RYAN GOT HER FIRST KISS FROM MATT WESTERLY, WHILE HER HEART WENT WILD!



NOW BEAT IT, BEFORE I GET MAD AT YOU FOR KEEPING ME WAITING SO LONG! GO FIND YOURSELF SOME EVIDENCE!

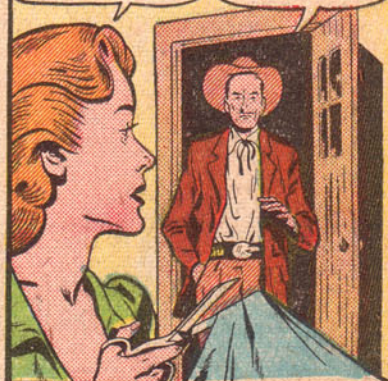


I SHORE WILL, KATIE DARLING, AND WHEN I GET DUKE KELLAN'S EARS PINNED, I'LL COME BACK AND MAKE THAT PROPOSAL OFFICIAL!

WITH A SONG IN HER HEART, KATIE WENT BACK TO HER DRESSMAKING! A SHORT TIME LATER...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, DUKE KELLAN?

TAKE IT EASY, MISS RYAN! I WANT TO MAKE PEACE!



I'M PLANNING NEW COSTUMES FOR MY DANCING GIRLS AND I FIGURED YOU SHOULD HAVE THE JOB OF MAKING THEM! I'LL PAY WELL!

AH-HA! SO NOW YOU'RE TRYING TO BRIBE ME TO KEEP QUIET! THAT PROVES YOU'RE CHEATING AND AFRAID I'LL EXPOSE YOU!



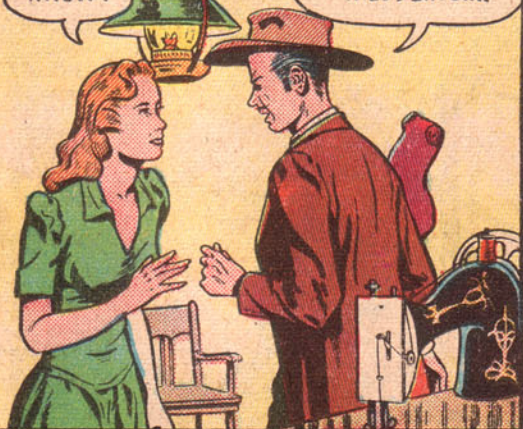
THEN AN IDEA BURST IN KATIE RYAN'S MIND...A WONDERFUL, SIMPLE IDEA THAT WOULD SETTLE EVERYTHING FOR MATT WESTERLY!

IF I MAKE DUKE ANGRY ENOUGH TO HURT ME, THEN MATT WILL HAVE HIS EXCUSE TO RUN HIM OUT OF TOWN! DUKE IS FURIOUS ALREADY! IT WON'T BE HARD...



SAVE YOUR BRIBES, DUKE! YOU'LL NEED YOUR MONEY TO GET OUT OF TOWN WHEN WE WOMEN SMASH UP YOUR PLACE! WE'RE GOING TO, YOU KNOW!

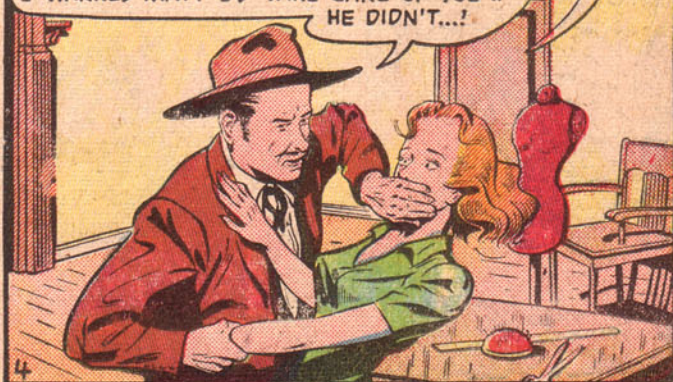
WHY, YOU LITTLE, MEDDLING...!



THEN KATIE SAW THE WILD FURY IN DUKE KELLAN'S EYES AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SHE REALIZED THAT SHE HAD GONE TOO FAR!

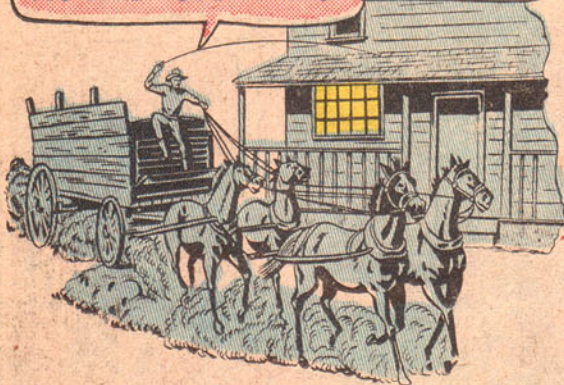
YOU WON'T SMASH ANYTHING BECAUSE YOU WON'T BE AROUND TO SMASH THINGS! I WARNED MATT I'D TAKE CARE OF YOU IF HE DIDN'T...!

MMMFFF-BMMM!



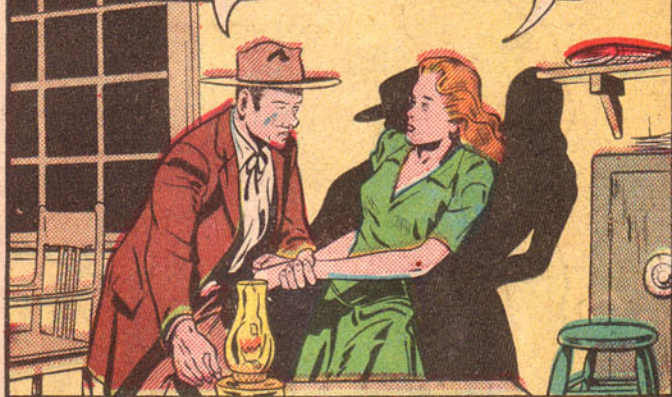
AT THAT MOMENT A GIGANTIC ORE WAGON FROM THE WASHUPP MINE CAME RUMBLING DOWN THE STREET WITH THE NOISE OF A HUNDRED LANDSLIDES!

YIPPEE! GIT ALONG, YOU HAMMER-HEADED, JUG-EARED SIDEWINDERS!



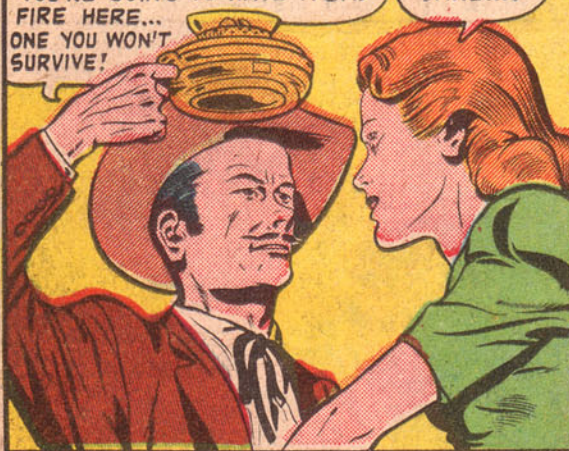
GO AHEAD AND SCREAM NOW! NOBODY COULD HEAR YOU TEN FEET AWAY WITH THE NOISE OF THAT ORE WAGON! I KNEW ONE WAS DUE ALONG....!

YOU BEAST! TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF ME! WHEN MATT CATCHES YOU....!



MATT WON'T CATCH ME! I'VE GOT TOO GOOD A SETUP HERE TO LET YOU SPOIL IT! YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A BAD FIRE HERE... ONE YOU WON'T SURVIVE!

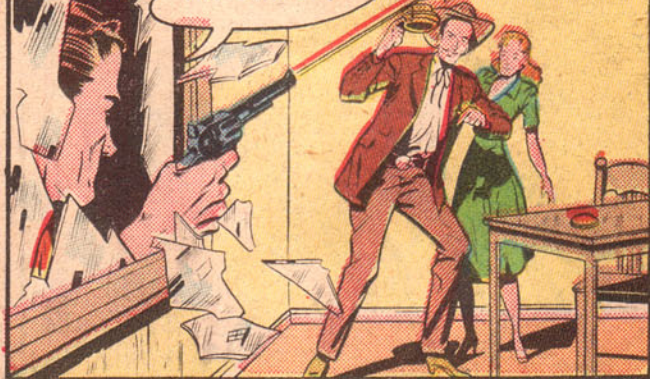
YOU CAN'T! YOU WOULDN'T DARE....!



SUDDENLY THE CRASH OF BREAKING GLASS SOUNDED ABOVE THE RUMBLE OF THE WAGON!

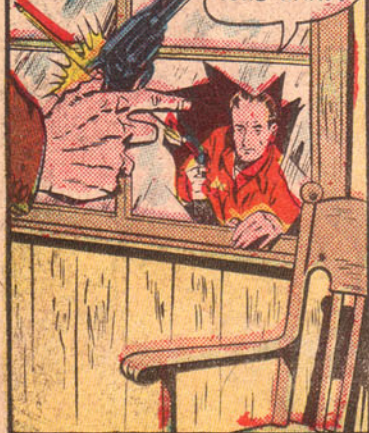
RECKON HE'D DARE, ALL RIGHT, HONEY! DUKE'S THAT KIND OF A POLECAT! BUT HE WON'T GET THE CHANCE!

MATT!



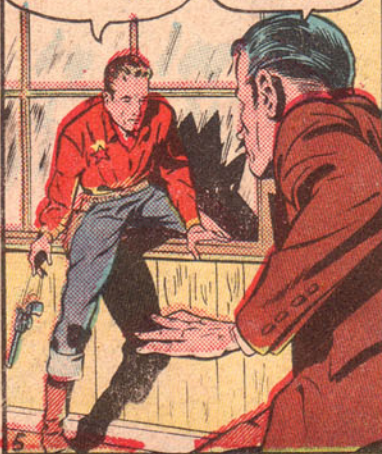
I'LL FINISH YOU...OOWOOO!

I WARNED YOU, DUKE...IF YOU CAME NEAR MY KATIE TO HAVE THAT GUN IN YORE HAND!



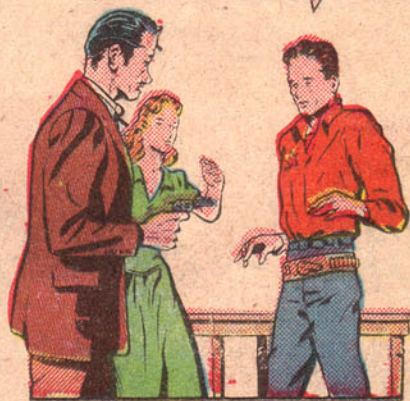
BUT I RECKON WHAT NEEDS DOING NOW CAN BE DONE BEST WITH EMPTY FISTS!

STAY BACK! DON'T TOUCH ME, MATT WESTERLY!



THANKS FOR THROWING AWAY YOUR GUN, LAWDOG! I'VE ONLY GOT ONE BULLET IN THIS DERRINGER AND I DON'T WANT IT TO MISS!

A HOLDOUT GUN! I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN....!



PUT DOWN THAT PISTOL AND FIGHT LIKE A MAN, YOU BUZZARD!



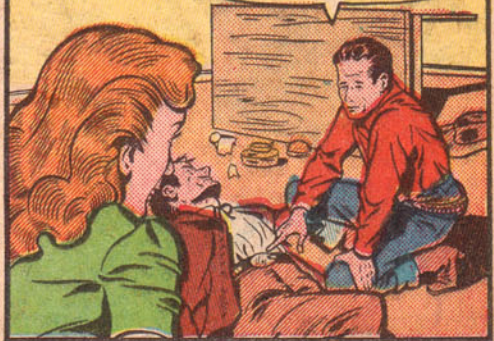
THE FIGHT WAS SHORT AND SWEET..

AND THERE'S THE PUNCH THAT PUTS THE PALACE OF PLEASURE UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT!



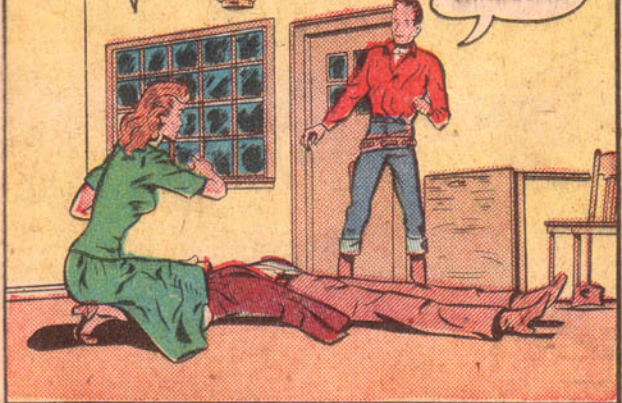
WONDERFUL, MATT! BUT IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR ME, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE HAD ANYTHING AGAINST DUKE!

OH, YES I WOULD! I FINALLY FIGURED HOW HE CHEATED AT CARDS! HE SLUMPED DOWN AND SAW EVERY CARD HE DEALT REFLECTED IN THIS SHINY BELT BUCKLE!



THEN...THEN YOU GOT RID OF DUKE BY YOURSELF! I WASN'T MUCH HELP AFTER ALL!

SURE YOU WERE, HONEY! I KNEW HE'D GO AFTER YOU TO SHUT YOUR MOUTH SO I BEEN KIND OF KEEPING AN EYE ON YOUR WINDOWS!



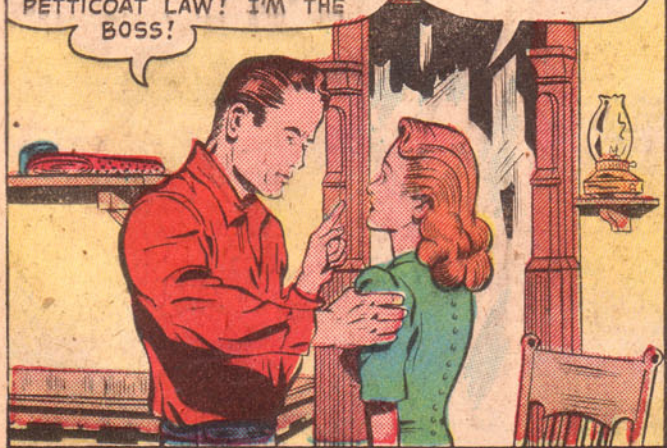
THEN...THEN, YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO SAY TO ME, HAVEN'T YOU, MATT?

YEP! BUT FIRST WE'RE GOING TO HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING...!

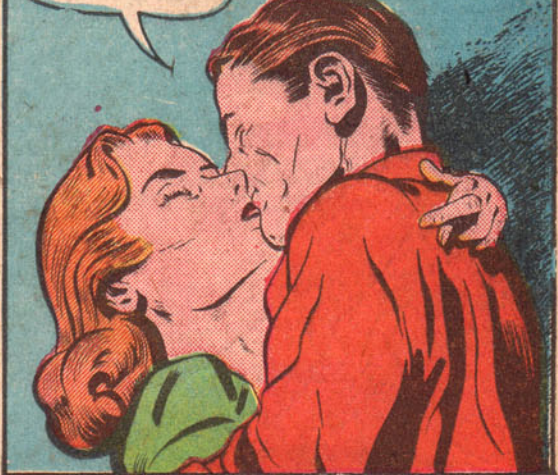


WHEN WE'RE MARRIED... NO MORE BLOWING UP AND BAWLING ME OUT! AND NO MORE TRYING TO MAKE ME ENFORCE YOUR PETTICOAT LAW! I'M THE BOSS!

ALL R-RIGHT, MATT! I PROMISE! YOU'LL BE THE BOSS IN EVERYTHING!

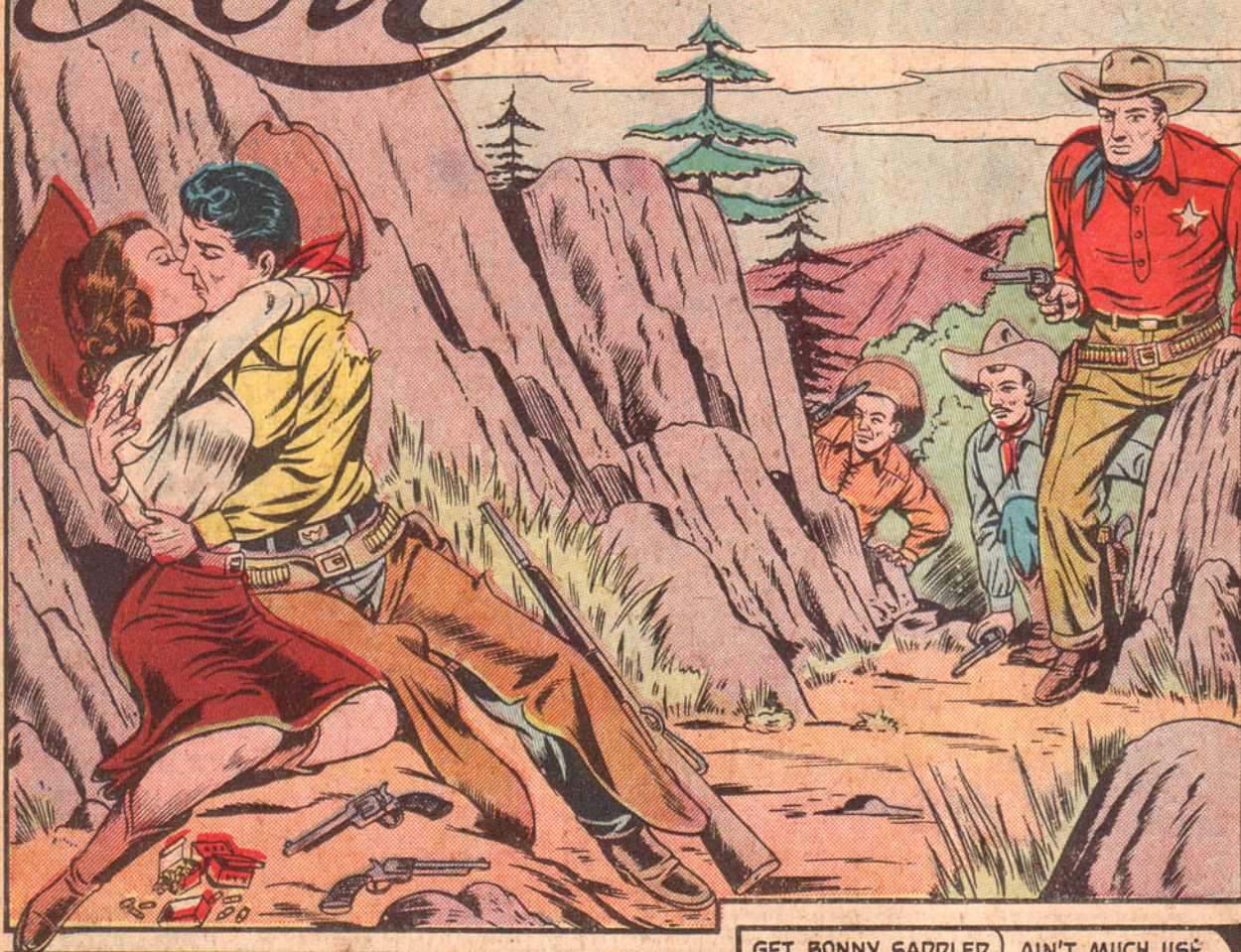


THEN IF EVERYTHING'S SETTLED...WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?



OUTLAW Love

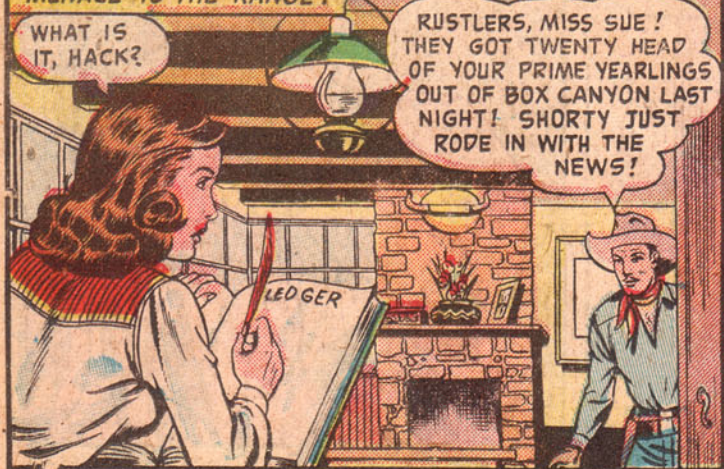
WHEN SUE WADE CAUGHT A STRANGER
BLOTTING THE BRAND ON ONE OF
HER CIRCLE W STEERS... SHE DID WHAT ANY
WESTERNER WOULD DO WITH A RUSTLER! IT
WAS NOT UNTIL THE NOOSE OF JUSTICE WAS
READY TO TIGHTEN ON CLAY DALLAS'S NECK
THAT SUE REALIZED THE TERRIBLE TRUTH...
SHE HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH THIS BRAZEN
RIDER FROM THE OWLHOOT TRAIL!



FOR SUE WADE, THE PROBLEMS OF MANAGING HER
CIRCLE W RANCH WERE COMPLICATED BY A NEW
MENACE TO THE RANGE!

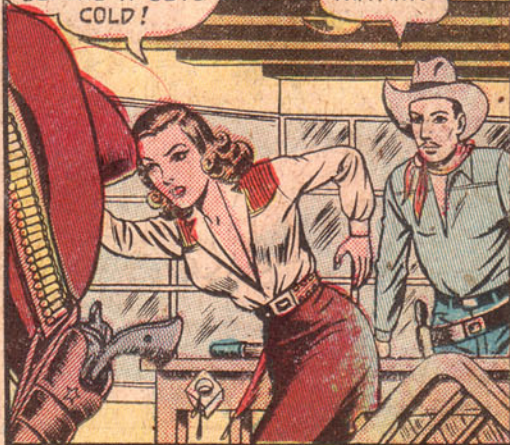
WHAT IS
IT, HACK?

RUSTLERS, MISS SUE!
THEY GOT TWENTY HEAD
OF YOUR PRIME YEARLINGS
OUT OF BOX CANYON LAST
NIGHT! SHORTY JUST
RODE IN WITH THE
NEWS!



GET BONNY SADDLED
RIGHT AWAY! WE'LL
SEE IF WE CAN PICK
UP THE TRAIL
BEFORE IT GETS
COLD!

AIN'T MUCH USE,
BUT WE CAN TRY!
I SENT SHORTY ON
FOR THE SHERIFF,
MA'AM!



A FEW MINUTES LATER...

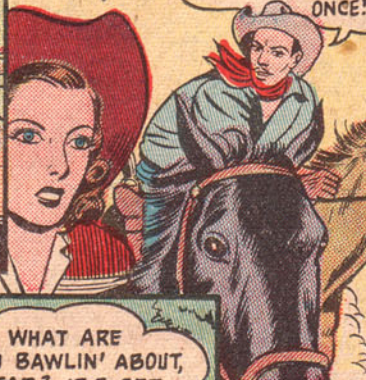
MUSTA BEEN THAT EVERY RANCH IN THE GIFFORD GANG AGAIN! THEY ALLUS SEEM TO KNOW WHERE THE BEST BEEF IS STASHED!

THEY'VE HIT EVERY RANCH IN THE COUNTY! WE CAN'T STAND MANY MORE LOSSES LIKE THIS, HACK!



THEY'VE GOT SOMEBODY SCOUTING THE RANGES FOR THEM! THEY ALWAYS KNOW WHERE TO STRIKE AND MAKE A CLEAN GETAWAY!

RECKON YOU'RE RIGHT, MA'AM! I WISH I COULD LAY A GUN-SIGHT ON THEM POLECATS JUST ONCE!



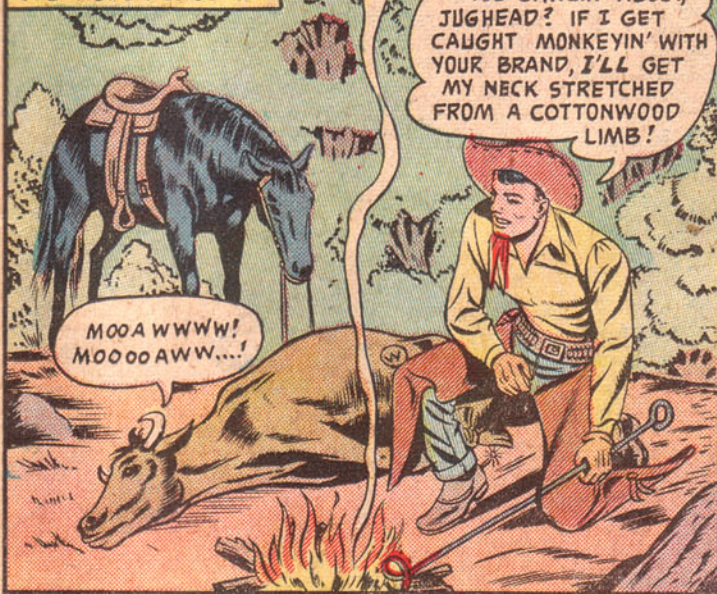
SUDDENLY SUE CRIED OUT TO HER FOREMAN...

HACK, LOOK! ISN'T THAT SMOKE ABOVE THAT ASPEN GROVE?

SHORE IS, MISS SUE! GOT A MIGHTY THIN FIRE UP THERE! WE BETTER SASHAY UP THAT WAY, QUIET-LIKE!



WHILE UP THE SLOPE, IN A CLEARING IN THE ASPEN GROVE...



WHAT ARE YOU BAWLIN' ABOUT, JUGHEAD? IF I GET CAUGHT MONKEYIN' WITH YOUR BRAND, I'LL GET MY NECK STRETCHED FROM A COTTONWOOD LIMB!

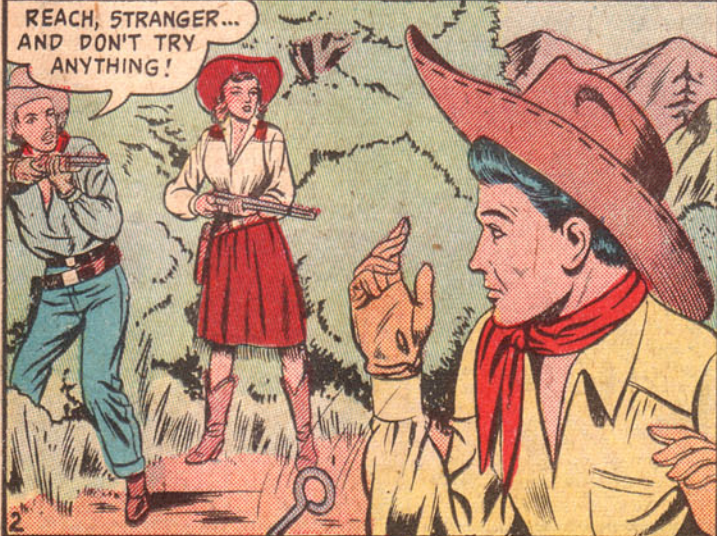
MOO A WWW! MOOOO AWW....!

A RUSTLER! I'LL GET THE VARMINT!

NO! WE'LL TAKE HIM TO THE SHERIFF! NO SHOOTING, HACK!



REACH, STRANGER... AND DON'T TRY ANYTHING!



YUH OUGHTA LET ME VENTILATE THE DIRTY POLECAT! THAT'S ONE OF YORE BEST YEARLINGS!

SKIP THAT, HACK! YOU, MISTER... UNBUCKLE YOUR GUN BELT AND LET IT DROP EASY!



AT CLOSER RANGE, SUE GOT A VIEW OF A LEAN, HANDSOME FACE... RECKLESS GRAY EYES... A DEVIL-MAY-CARE GRIN!

MA'AM, IF I'D KNOWN IT WAS SO PLEASANT TO BE CAUGHT, I'D HAVE GOTTEN CARELESS LONG AGO!

SAVE YOUR PRETTY SPEECHES FOR THE SHERIFF, STRANGER! HE'LL BE ON HIS WAY OUT HERE BY NOW!

I WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO HANG A STRANGER, MISS, SO LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF! I'M CLAY DALLAS, A JUDGE OF GOOD CATTLE AND PRETTY GIRLS!

YOU'RE A RUSTLER CAUGHT IN THE ACT! THAT'S ALL THAT CONCERNS ME! GET ABOARD YOUR HORSE AND DON'T MAKE ANY BREAKS!

SUE'S HEART WAS ODDLY STIRRED BY THIS DARING RUSTLER WHO SEEMED SO INDIFFERENT TO THE FATE THAT AWAITED HIM! HER CONFUSION FOUND REFUGE IN ANGER!

AND DON'T FIGURE YOU CAN SWEET-TALK YOURSELF OUT OF THIS! WE'VE LOST TOO MANY STEERS THIS SPRING TO BE GENTLE!

DON'T BLAME ME, MA'AM! I JUST HIT THIS COUNTRY YESTERDAY!

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, MISS SUE! HE'S LIKELY PART OF GIFFORD'S WILD BUNCH!

DON'T BE LOCO, HACK! GIFFORD WOULDN'T BOTHER WITH ONE MEASELY STEER! THIS VARMINT'S JUST A LONE WOLF WHO LOST A GAMBLE!

WHAT MADE YOU DO IT, DALLAS? YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE AN ORDINARY STUPID RUSTLER!

I'M AN EXTRA-ORDINARY RUSTLER, MISS SUE! YOU SHOULD FEEL COMPLIMENTED! I NEVER WASTE MY TIME WITH ANY BUT PRIME BEEF!

I'M REALLY AN ARTIST! GIVE ME A NICE HOT RUNNING IRON AND I CAN CHANGE ANY BRAND! I AIMED TO BUILD MYSELF A LITTLE HERD HERE!

KEEP IT UP, MISTER! YORE HANGING YORE-SELF HIGHER WITH EVERY WORD!

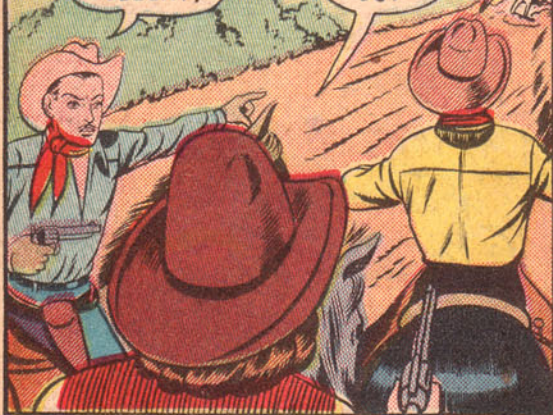
SUE TRIED TO HATE THIS BRAZEN THIEF BUT THE SIGHT OF HIS CLEAN HANDSOME PROFILE PUT A LUMP IN HER THROAT!

OH, WHY DOES HE HAVE TO BE A RUSTLER? HE'LL BE HANGED FOR SURE, AND HE WON'T SAY A WORD TO DEFEND HIMSELF! I-I EVEN WISH HE'D MAKE A BREAK AND GET AWAY!

SUDDENLY HER BITTER THOUGHTS WERE INTERRUPTED!

THERE'S SHORTY WITH THE SHERIFF, MISS SUE! HE'LL MAKE QUICK WORK OF THIS BRAND-BLOTTING POLECAT!

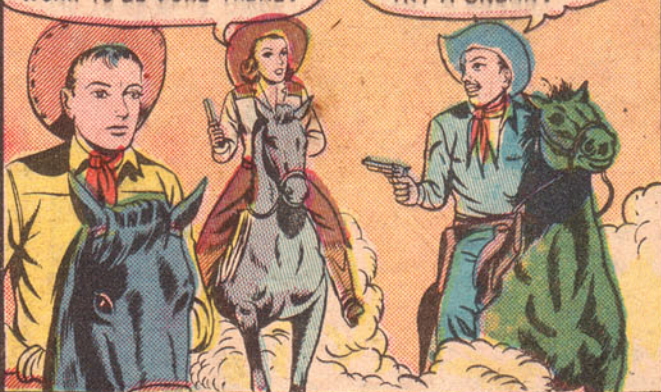
OH...! YES... YES, I SUPPOSE SO!



THEN SUE'S INNER TURMOIL CRYSTALLIZED INTO DECISION!

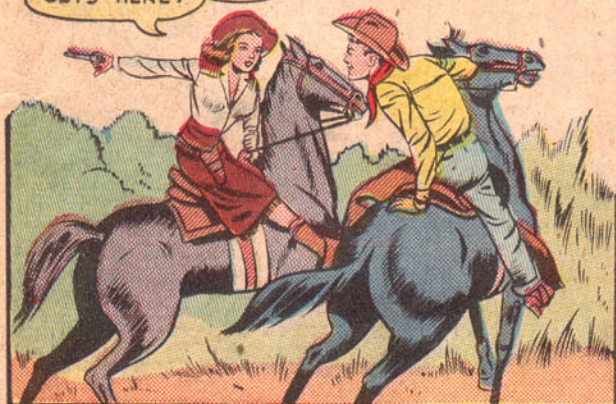
RIDE ON AHEAD AND MEET THEM, HACK! TELL SHORTY TO HURRY BACK TO THE RANCH! THERE'S A LOT OF WORK TO BE DONE THERE!

WH...? ALL RIGHT, IF YOU SAY SO! BUT KEEP AN EYE ON THIS SLICK HOMBRE! HE MIGHT TRY A BREAK!



DON'T STOP TO MAKE SPEECHES, DALLAS! GET OUT OF HERE! HIT FOR THE HIGH HILLS! HURRY, BEFORE THE SHERIFF GETS HERE!

WHAT? YOU WANT ME TO ESCAPE? WHY?



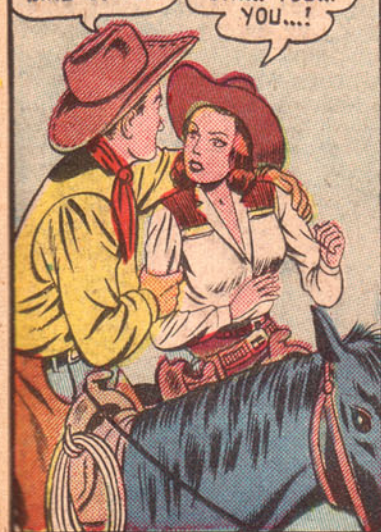
DON'T ASK ME WHY! JUST CLEAR OUT! I'M GIVING YOU A BREAK! TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT!

MISS SUE, THAT'S JUST WHAT I AIM TO DO... TAKE **FULL** ADVANTAGE OF IT...



LIKE THIS!

OH...! YOU... YOU...!



OH, WHY DID YOU DO THAT? WHY DON'T YOU ESCAPE?

THE MOMENT I SAW YOU, LITTLE SUE-- I QUIT WANTING TO ESCAPE! HOW COULD I RUN AWAY AND LEAVE MY HEART HERE WITH YOU? I RUSTLED YOUR STEER...BUT YOU'VE RUSTLED MY HEART!



THROUGH A MIST OF ANGUISHED TEARS, SUE SAW CLAY DALLAS'S HOPE OF ESCAPE LOST!

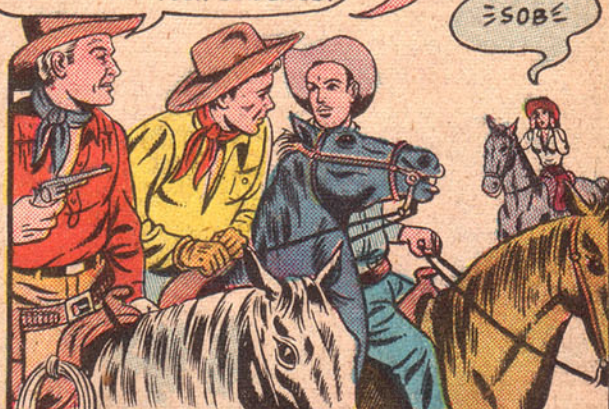
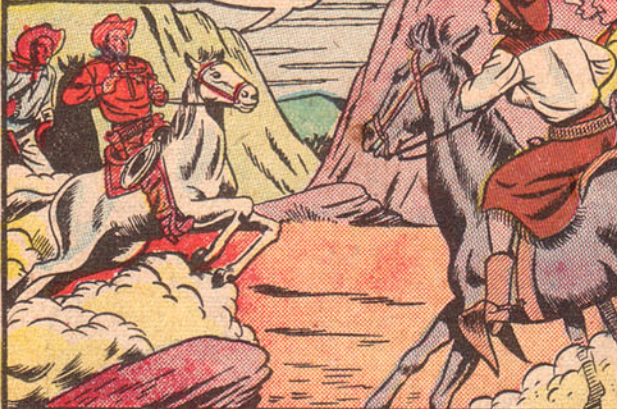
GOOD WORK, MISS SUE! WE'LL TAKE CHARGE OF THIS BUZZARD NOW!

GULP! ALL-ALL RIGHT, SHERIFF! I'LL COME IN FOR HIS TRIAL!

WE'LL HAVE THE TRIAL TOMORROW MORNING, MA'AM, SO WE CAN GET THE HANGING OVER WITH BY NOON! IT WON'T TAKE LONG WITH YOUR EVIDENCE!

SO LONG, MA'AM... AND THANKS, ANYHOW!

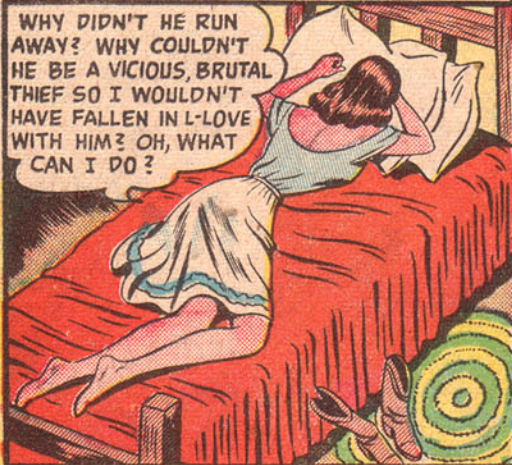
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BACK AT THE RANCH, SUE THREW HERSELF ON HER BED AND LET THE TEARS OF ANGUISH COME UNCHECKED!

THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO! I CAN'T LET THEM HANG HIM! I'LL RESCUE HIM AS SOON AS IT'S DARK! I'VE GOT TO!

SLOWLY THE ENDLESS HOURS WENT BY, THE SUN SET AND DARKNESS CAME TO HIDE THE MARKS OF GRIEF AND THE MOVEMENTS OF HER PLAN!



WHY DIDN'T HE RUN AWAY? WHY COULDN'T HE BE A VICIOUS, BRUTAL THIEF SO I WOULDN'T HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HIM? OH, WHAT CAN I DO?

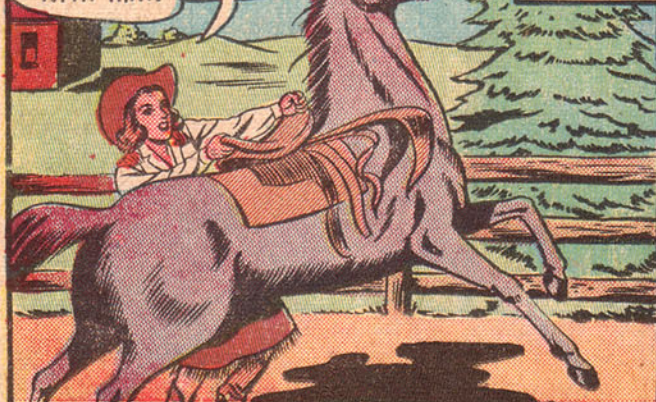


THERE GOES HACK FOR AN EVENING IN TOWN! I'LL LET HIM GET A GOOD START BEFORE I RIDE IN!



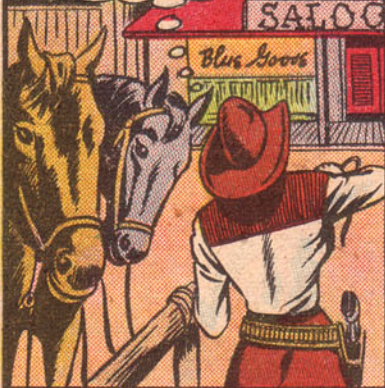
THE SHERIFF LEAVES HIS KEYS IN HIS OFFICE DESK! HE'S NEVER AROUND THE JAIL AT NIGHT! I'LL GET CLAY OUT AND MAKE HIM LEAVE! I'D-I'D EVEN GO WITH HIM!

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME? I HATE RUSTLERS LIKE POISON...YET HERE I GO, RISKING MY REPUTATION TO SAVE ONE WHO ISN'T EVEN SORRY FOR WHAT HE DID!



AN HOUR LATER, IN TOWN...

I'LL TIE BONNY NEXT TO HACK'S HORSE! CLAY CAN TAKE THAT AND IF HE ASKS ME, I'LL RIDE WITH HIM! WE CAN GO SOMEWHERE AND START OVER!



BUT AS SUE CREPT DOWN THE STREET TOWARD THE JAIL, SHE SUDDENLY FROZE...

SOME-ONE ELSE IS AT THE JAIL WINDOW! THEY'RE TALKING TO CLAY!

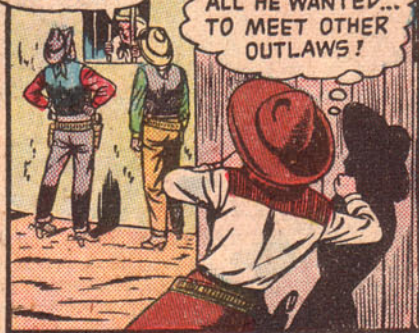
GIFFORD'S THE NAME, HOMBRE! YOU'VE HEARD OF ME AND MY GANG! I'VE HEARD OF YOU! YOU'RE AN ARTIST WITH THE BRAND-ING IRONS!



A SICK HORROR GREW WITHIN SUE'S BREAST AS SHE LISTENED TO THE STEALTHY WHISPERS FROM THE SHADOWS!

I'VE HEARD OF YOUR OUTFIT, GIFFORD! YOU'RE THE PHANTOM RUSTLERS NOBODY CAN CATCH! I WAS HOPING TO MEET YOU WHEN I DRIFTED THIS WAY!

OH...! TH-THAT'S ALL HE WANTED... TO MEET OTHER OUTLAWS!



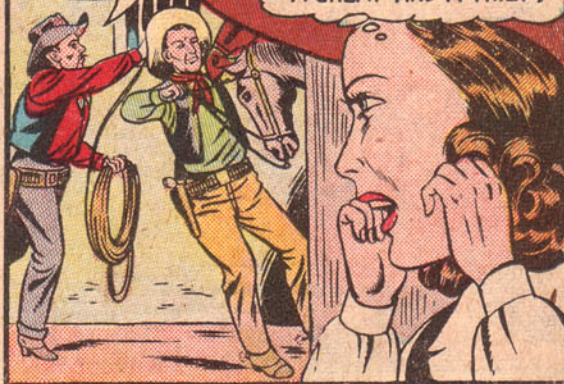
I HEAR YOU GOT WHAT WE NEED! WANT TO HIT THE TRAIL WITH MY WILD BUNCH IF WE HELP YOU GET LOOSE?

DO YOU THINK I'M LOCO, GIFFORD? IF I STAY HERE, I'LL STRETCH 'HEMP! SURE, I'LL GO WITH YOU! JUST GET ME OUT, AND GIVE ME A GUN!



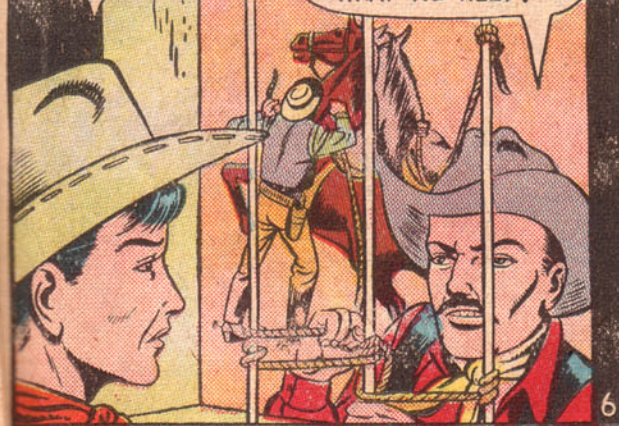
GET READY! WE'LL JERK THE BARS OFF WITH OUR LASS-ROPE! THERE'S AN EXTRA HORSE WAITING AROUND THE CORNER!

OH, CLAY, YOU WOULDN'T ESCAPE WHEN I GAVE YOU THE CHANCE! AND I THOUGHT YOU MEANT THOSE WORDS! YOU'RE A CHEAT AND A THIEF!



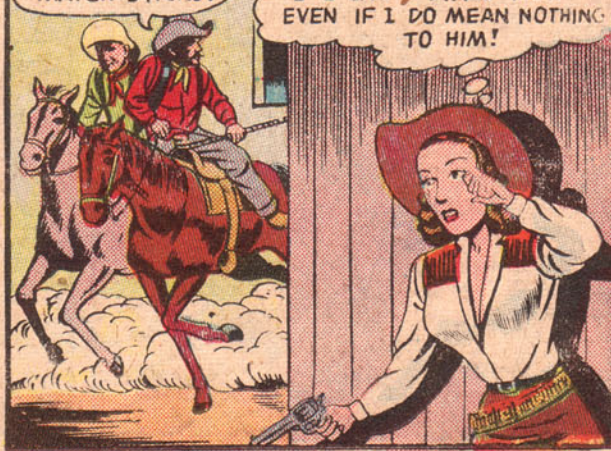
WHAT I CAN'T FIGURE IS HOW YOU HOMBRES HEARD ABOUT ME!

WE GOT WAYS OF KNOWING THINGS! OUR MAN TOLD US YOU HAD PLENTY OF NERVE AND A TRICK WITH THE RUNNING IRON! THAT'S WHAT WE NEED!



READY TO JUMP, DALLAS! THESE BARS'LL RIP OUT LIKE MATCH STICKS!

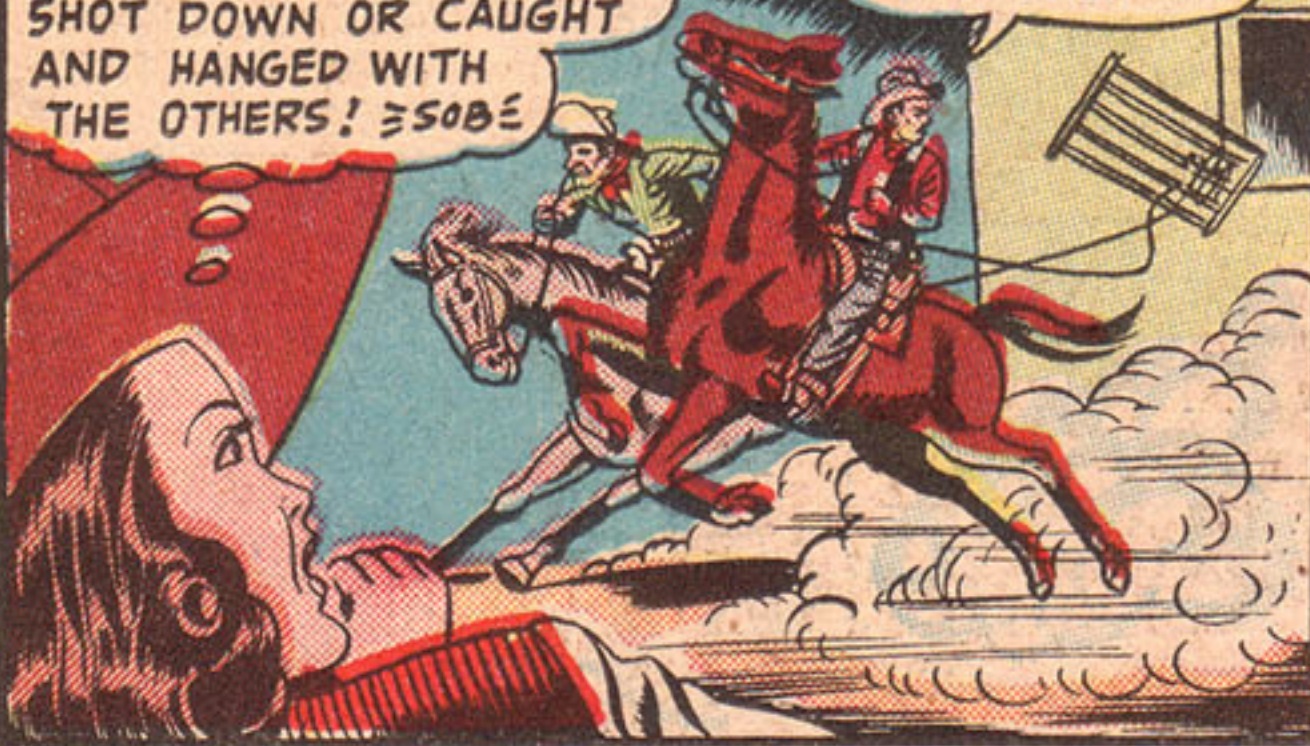
I COULD STOP THEM AND CAPTURE GIFFORD, THE RUSTLER... BUT IF I DO, CLAY WILL SURELY HANG! I-I CAN'T STAND THAT EVEN IF I DO MEAN NOTHING TO HIM!



WHILE SUE WATCHED, TORN BETWEEN HOPE AND TERROR, THE OUTLAWS RIPPED AWAY THE BARS...

NOW HE'LL RIDE OFF AND I'LL NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN...UNTIL HE'S SHOT DOWN OR CAUGHT AND HANGED WITH THE OTHERS! *Sobs*

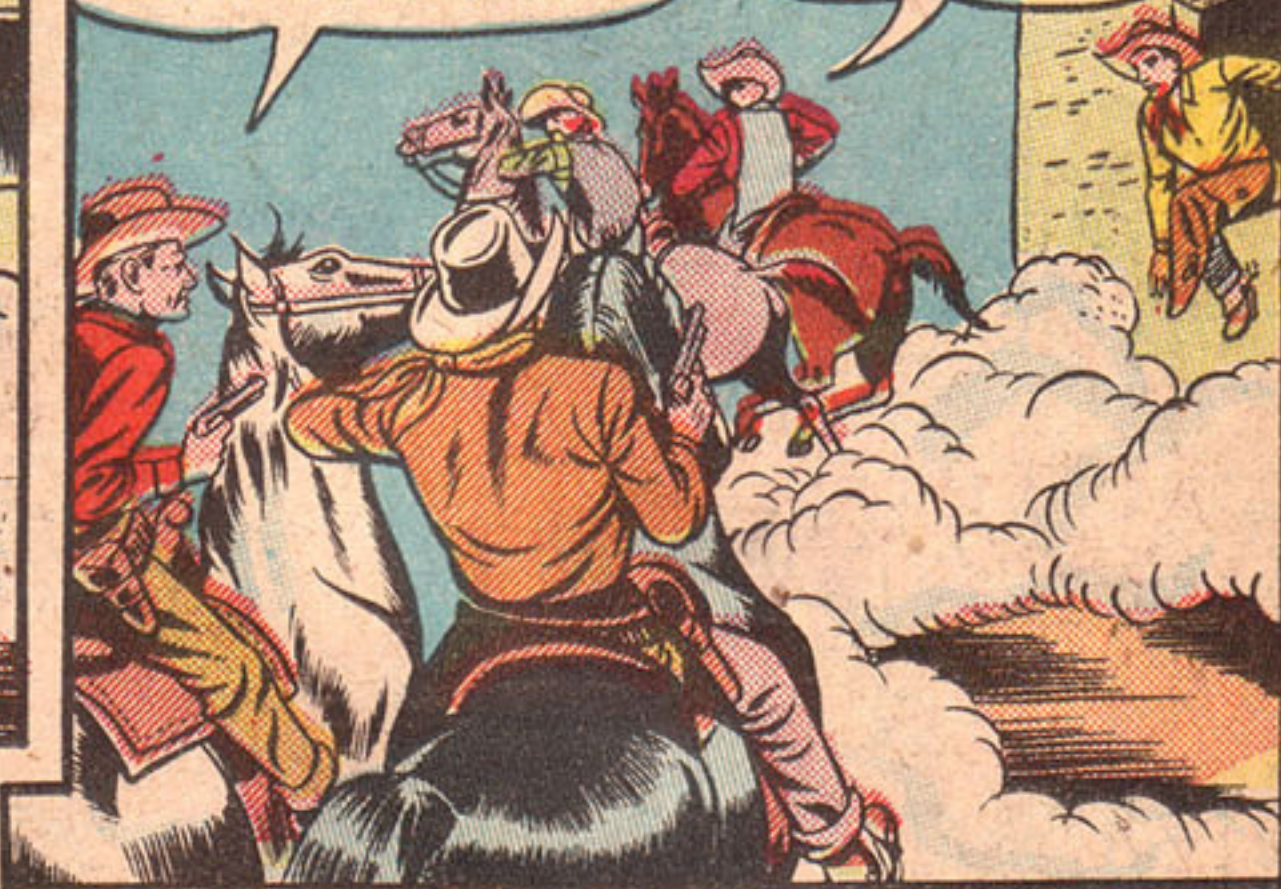
GET OUT FAST, DALLAS! THAT NOISE'LL BRING THE SHERIFF!



SUDDENLY...

THE SHERIFF IS ALREADY HERE, GIFFORD! REACH FOR THE SKY, BOTH OF YOU, OR WE'LL SHOOT!

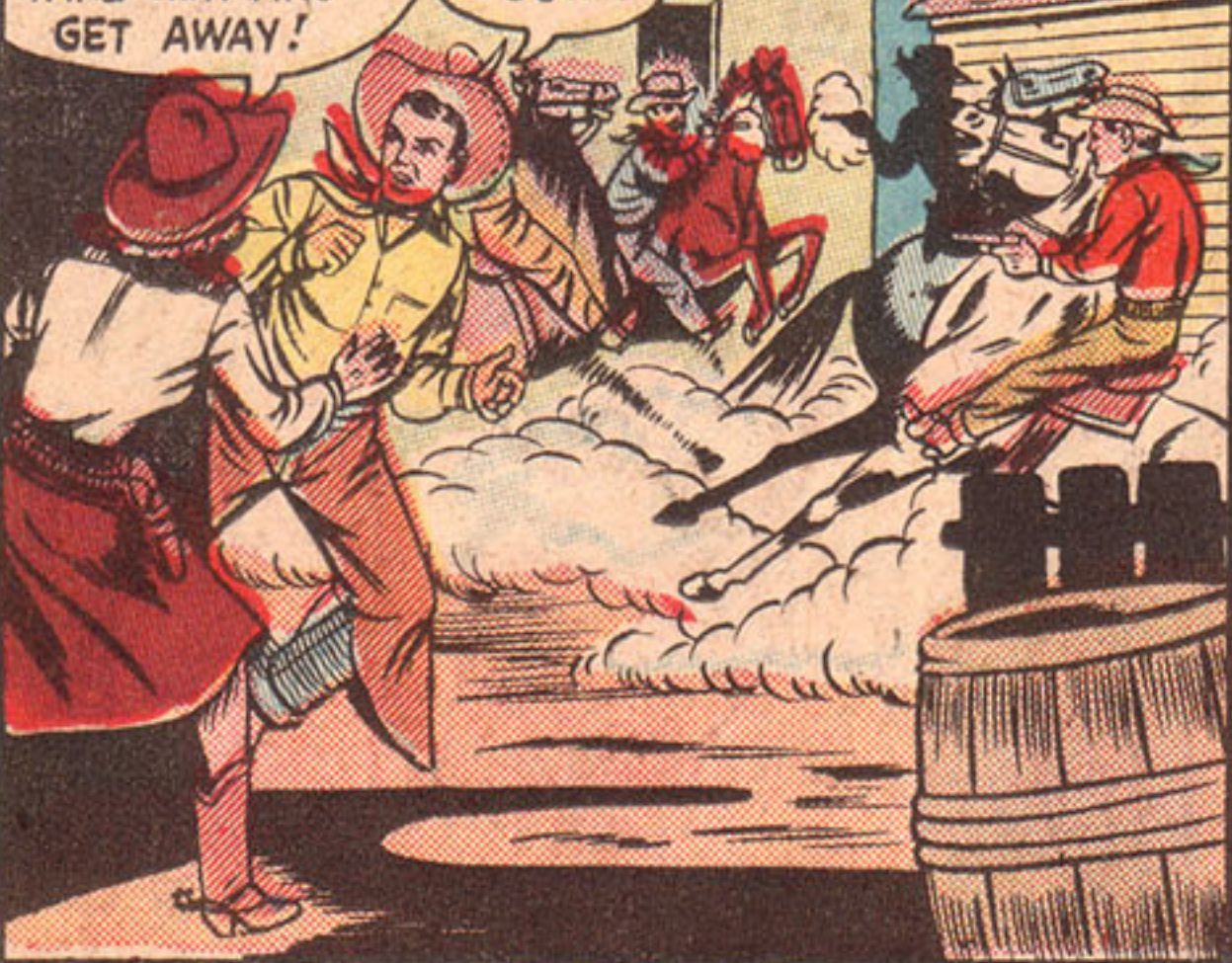
WHA...? BLAST HIM DOWN, PETE! MAKE A BREAK FOR THE HILLS!



AS A TUMULT OF GUNSHOTS SPLIT THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT, SUE SAW CLAY LEAP FROM THE WINDOW!

CLAY, CLAY! THIS WAY! MY HORSE IS AT THE RAIL! TAKE HIM AND GET AWAY!

SUE! YOU CAME TO RESCUE ME, TOO...!



SORRY, DEAREST! BUT I'VE GOT SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS! THIS GUN IS WHAT I NEED RIGHT NOW!

NO! CLAY, PLEASE...!



DOWN YOU COME, YOU BUSHWACKING, DOUBLE-DEALING BUZZARD!

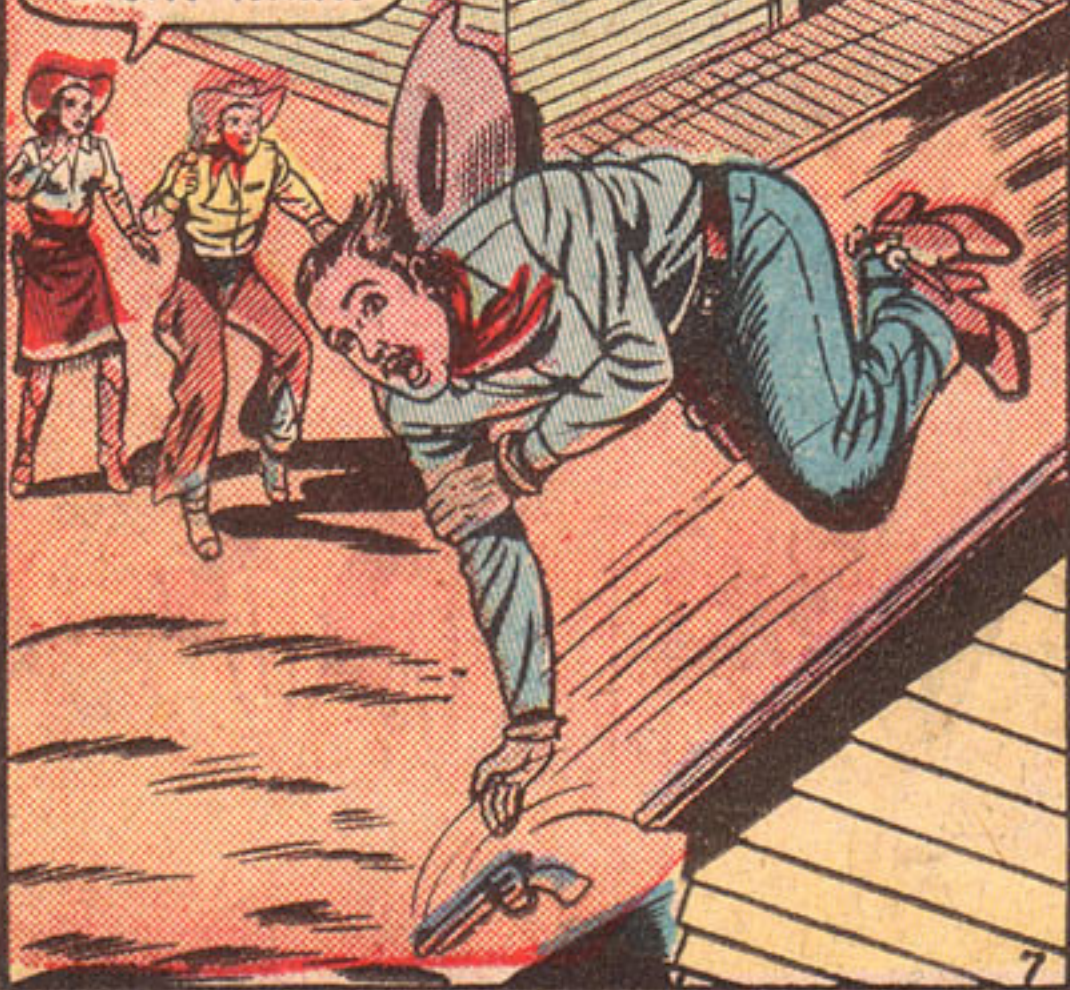
BLAM

DON'T...!



IN A DAZE OF HORROR, SUE SAW HER OWN FOREMAN TUMBLE FROM THE ROOF!

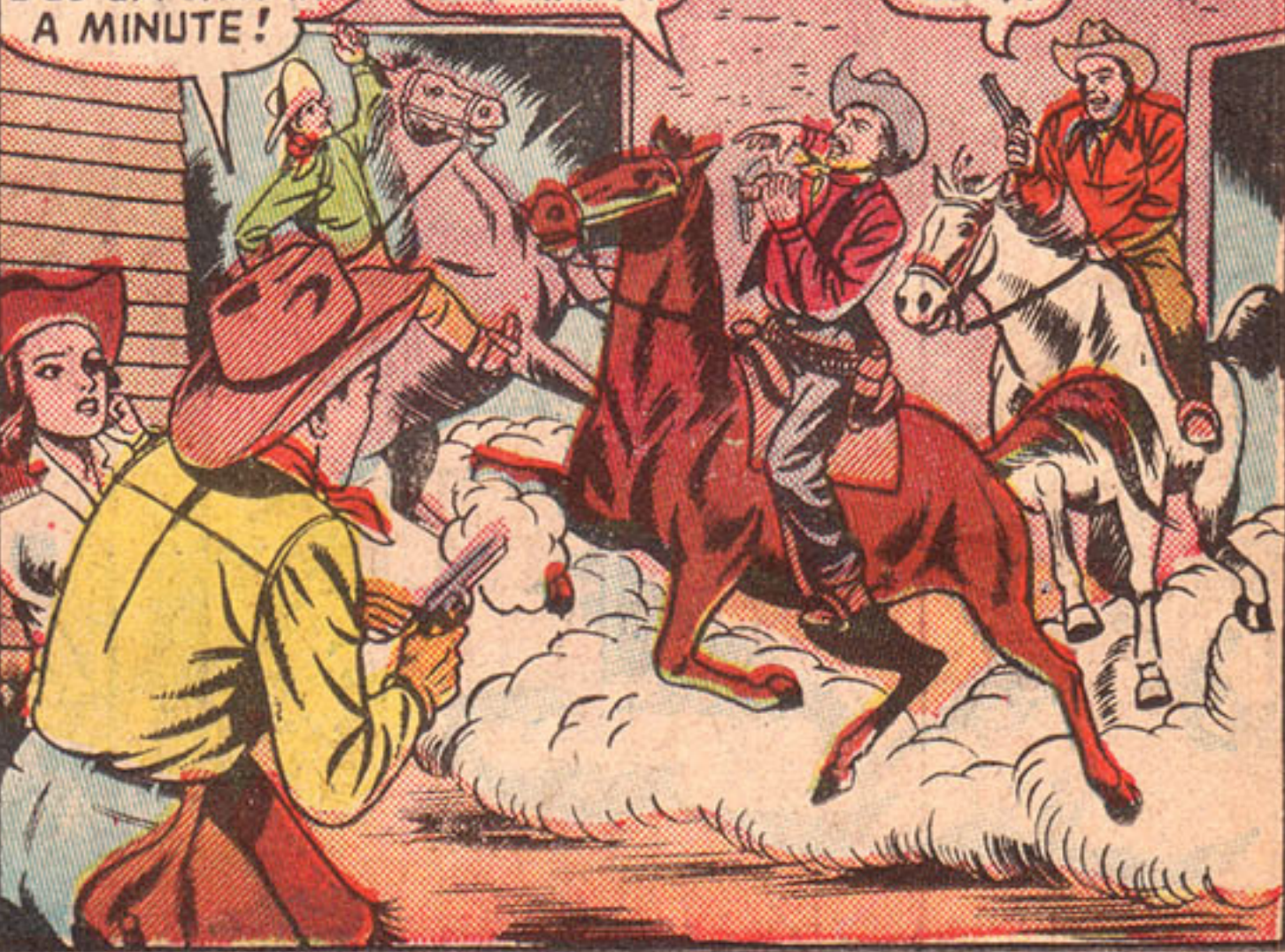
HACK! WH...?



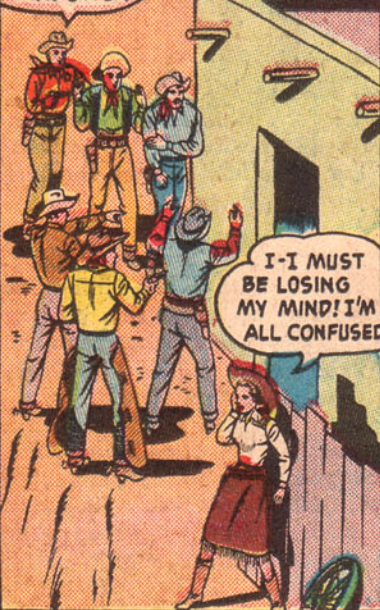
WATCH HIM, SUE! I'LL EXPLAIN IN A MINUTE!

OWOO... MY HAND!

GREAT WORK, CLAY!

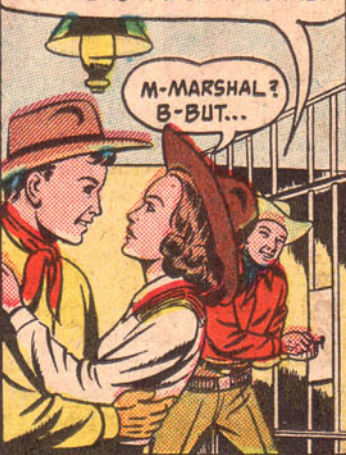


GET INSIDE, YOU THREE POLECATS! LUCKY WE GOT ANOTHER CELL WITH SOUND BARS ON THE WINDOWS!



I-I MUST BE LOSING MY MIND! I'M ALL CONFUSED!

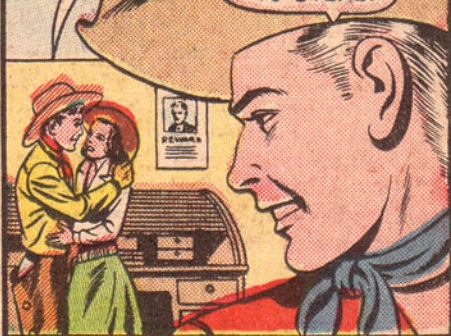
YOU'RE NO MORE CONFUSED THAN THOSE VARMINTS, MISS SUE! NOBODY GUESSED CLAY DALLAS IS A U.S. MARSHAL!



M-MARSHAL? B-BUT...

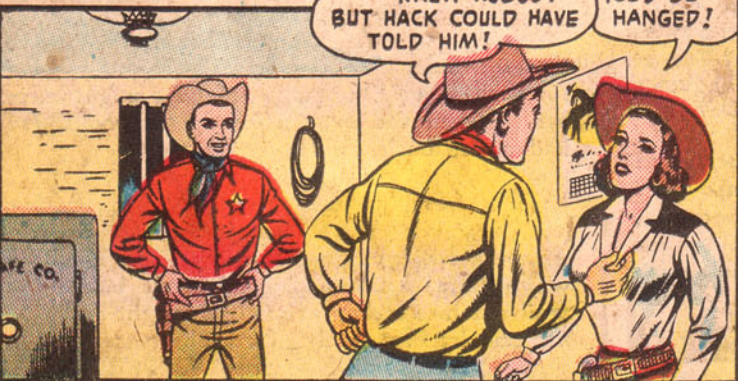
THAT'S RIGHT, HONEY! I PRETENDED TO BE A RUSTLER, HOPING I COULD TRICK THE GIFFORD CREW INTO REVEALING WHO TIPPED THEM OFF!

WE NEVER SUSPECTED IT WAS YOUR FOREMAN, HACK, WHO WAS WORKING WITH THE RUSTLERS TO LOCATE THE FINEST HERDS TO STEAL!



WHEN GIFFORD TOLD ME HE KNEW I WAS AN ARTIST WITH A RUNNING IRON AND SPOKE MY NAME, I KNEW NOBODY BUT HACK COULD HAVE TOLD HIM!

OH, CLAY, I WAS SICK WITH FEAR AND WORRY! I THOUGHT YOU'D BE HANGED!



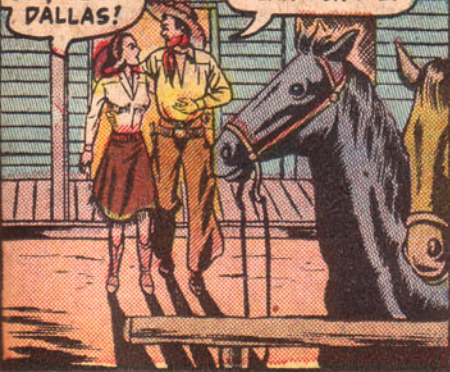
AND YOU RISKED EVERYTHING TO FREE ME, SUE DEAR! I DON'T RECKON THERE'S A MAN ALIVE WHO DESERVES THAT MUCH SACRIFICE... BUT IF YOU'D TRY ME...!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN-- IF?



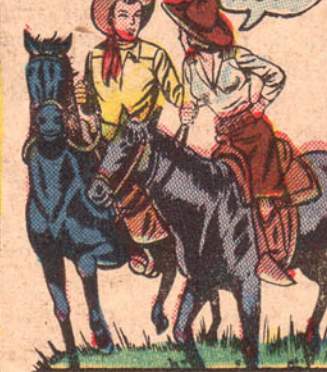
AFTER ALL THOSE PRETTY THINGS YOU SAID TO TURN MY HEAD AND UPSET MY HEART, YOU'D JUST BETTER NOT TRY TO WIGGLE OUT, CLAY DALLAS!

THOSE WEREN'T JUST PRETTY SPEECHES, HONEY! THEY CAME RIGHT OUT OF MY HEART... AND ALMOST SPOILED MY WHOLE PLAN FOR ME!



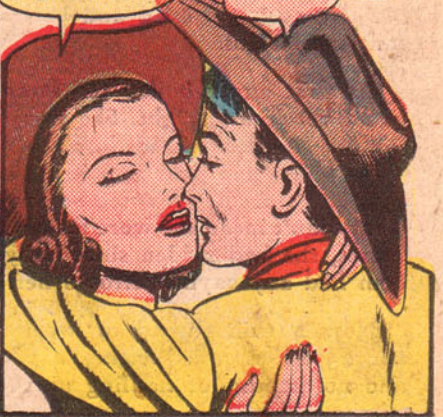
BUT I'M RETIRING AS MARSHAL AFTER THIS JOB, SUE! WOULD YOU CONSIDER MARRYING A PLAIN COWHAND WITHOUT A JOB?

NO, I WOULD NOT!



BUT I'D CONSIDER MARRYING THE NEW PARTNER IN THE CIRCLE W!

IT'S A DEAL, HONEY! PUCKER THOSE LIPS AND WE'LL SEAL THE CONTRACT RIGHT HERE AND NOW!



RIDING FOR A FALL

JENNIE KEENAN froze as a firm masculine hand closed on her elbow. She whirled angrily. "How dare you. . . ?"

Jed Munro, her father's darkly handsome foreman, grinned with lazy insolence, showing a flash of white teeth below his dark mustache. "Now, Miss Jennie, I've always told you I had all the nerve in the world when you're around." He chuckled down at her. "And most especially when I see you aiming to bust your neck. Yore daddy'd skin me alive if he knew I let you slip out to try riding Devil."

Her eyes flashing, Jennie tightened her grip on the reins of the great black stallion she was leading. "I can ride any four-legged critter alive and you know it. And I don't need any two-legged ones to tell me what to do."

Jed slid an arm around her slim waist. "You're purty as a cactus bloom when you're sore, honey. How about a little kiss, huh? You've kept me dangling about long enough, haven't you?"

With all her might, Jennie swung her hand and felt the pain as it exploded against Jed's cheek. He reeled back, a red mark forming, a red light of rage filling his eyes. He laughed again, but it was forced laughter, thick with emotion. "All right, you wild cat. You're riding for a fall. You've played high-and-mighty with me long as you're going to. You think you can tame any horse or any man alive. Well, you'll find out different."

Before he could step forward, Jennie snatched the reins from his grasp and leaped into the saddle. Jed's wild yell of anger was drowned in the swift thunder of hoofs as Devil, the fierce stallion, took his head and bolted for the distant mountains.

At first anger boiled too strongly in Jennie to let her know fright. She was furious at Jed for his insolence and his brazen arrogance. What if she had gone to a few dances with him at first, before he grew too bold in his advances? That didn't mean she wore his brand. And as for horses, she had ridden since babyhood and seldom had any cayuse thrown her.

Now a thin thread of worry touched her nerves. Devil was bolting a zig-zag pattern and no amount of hauling on the reins would

slow or turn him. He had his head and meant to keep it. When he got far off in the foothills, with the smell of wild freedom in his nostrils, he would throw her as he had thrown the best riders.

Suddenly she heard other hoofs pounding. She turned her head and saw Jed riding his own giant sorrel, coming up beside her. For the first time she was glad to see that grinning, impudent face. "Take me off, Jed. I bit off more than I can chew. I can't control Devil."

Jed laughed raucously. "Not me, honey. I'm letting Devil throw you good and then, if you've decided to be nice, I might give you a lift back to the ranch. Otherwise you've got a long walk—even if you're able to walk."

Jennie fought down panic. Jed meant it. He would let her be thrown, even crippled, for revenge and to force her submission. They were in the broken hills now and Devil was tensing for the last wild bucking spree that might leave her smashed and broken among the rocks. Jed had pulled back, still laughing.

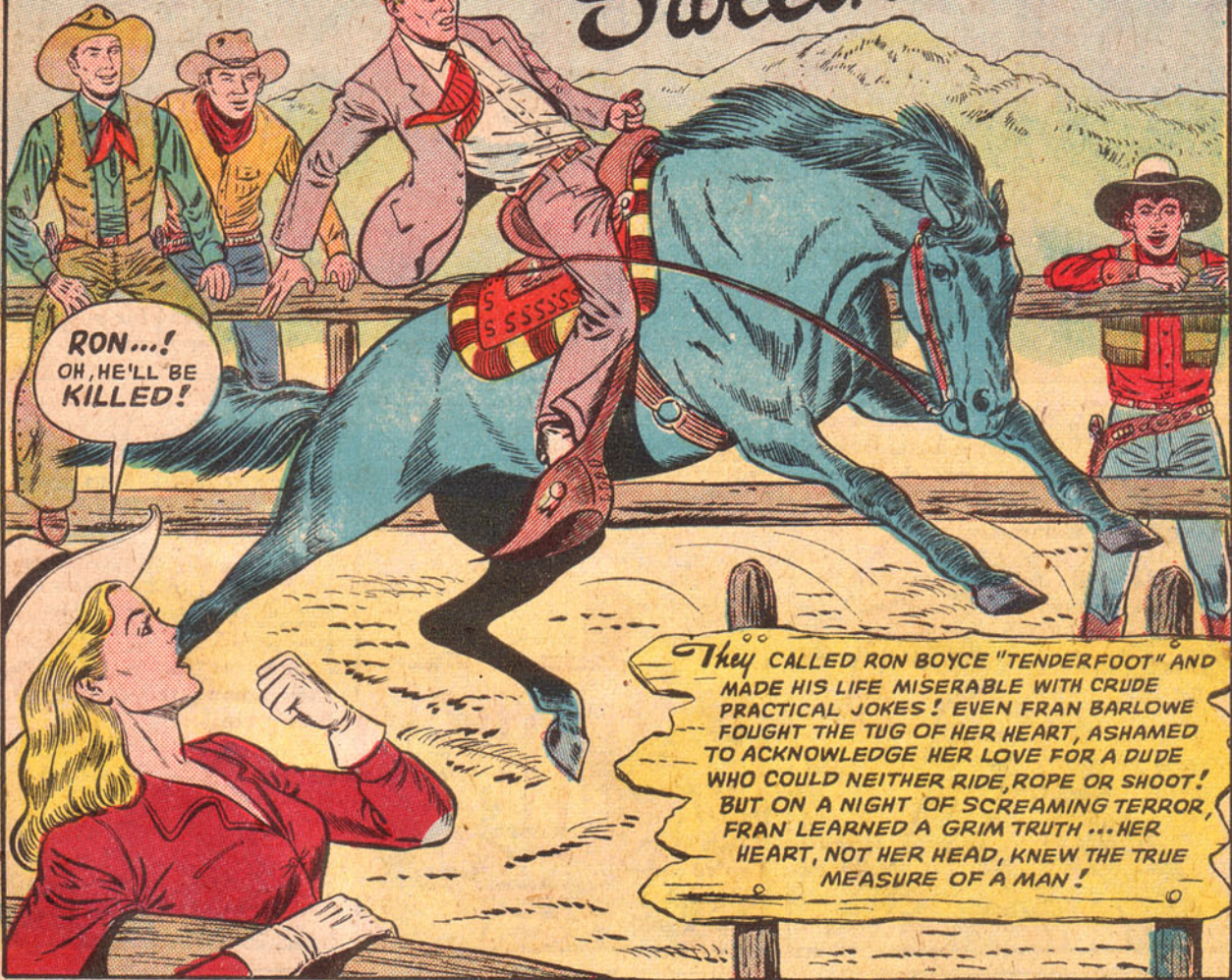
Then Devil seemed to explode beneath her and Jennie felt herself catapulted into the air. A shriek was wrenched from her lips. Then she was falling, not onto jagged rocks beside the trail but into strong arms that caught and held her and let her gently down. She stared into a bronzed handsome face, into bright blue eyes and a flash of warm laughter.

"That was a dirty trick, ma'am," a gentle voice said in her ear. "Reckon I don't like hombres who let a purty gal risk her neck."

She saw the stranger stride across to Jed who had swung down in a rage. She saw the stranger's arms shoot out like pistons and she saw Jed go back in a tangle of arms and legs, to lie motionless on the ground. The stranger turned. "You ride his horse, ma'am. A long walk'll do him good. Lucky I happened to be resting right there or you'd have had a rugged time. What were you doing, anyhow?"

Jennie smiled. "Riding for a fall," she said softly. "He said I was, anyhow. And I'm glad I did. Come along, stranger. If you're looking for a job, I know where there'll be a foreman's job open as quick as I can get home."

TENDERFOOT Sweetheart



RON...!
OH, HE'LL BE
KILLED!

They CALLED RON BOYCE "TENDERFOOT" AND MADE HIS LIFE MISERABLE WITH CRUDE PRACTICAL JOKES! EVEN FRAN BARLOWE FOUGHT THE TUG OF HER HEART, ASHAMED TO ACKNOWLEDGE HER LOVE FOR A DUDE WHO COULD NEITHER RIDE, ROPE OR SHOOT! BUT ON A NIGHT OF SCREAMING TERROR, FRAN LEARNED A GRIM TRUTH...HER HEART, NOT HER HEAD, KNEW THE TRUE MEASURE OF A MAN!

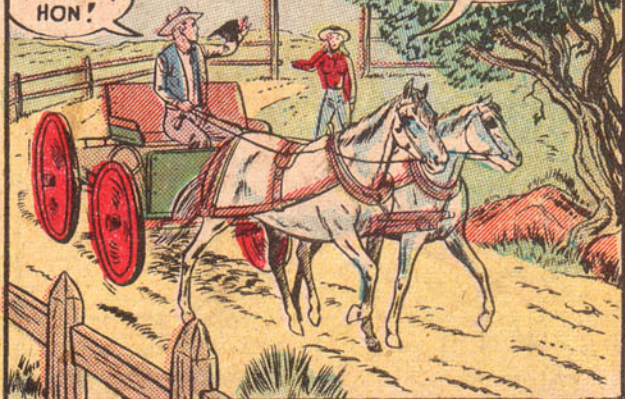
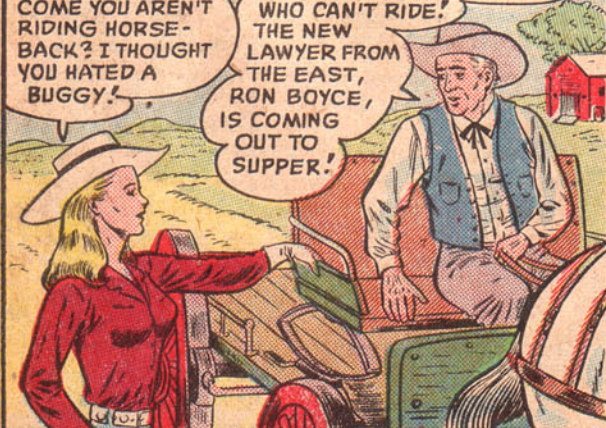
FRAN BARLOWE HAD NO IDEA HOW HER FATHER'S REGULAR TRIP INTO TOWN ONE FRIDAY WOULD CHANGE HER LIFE!

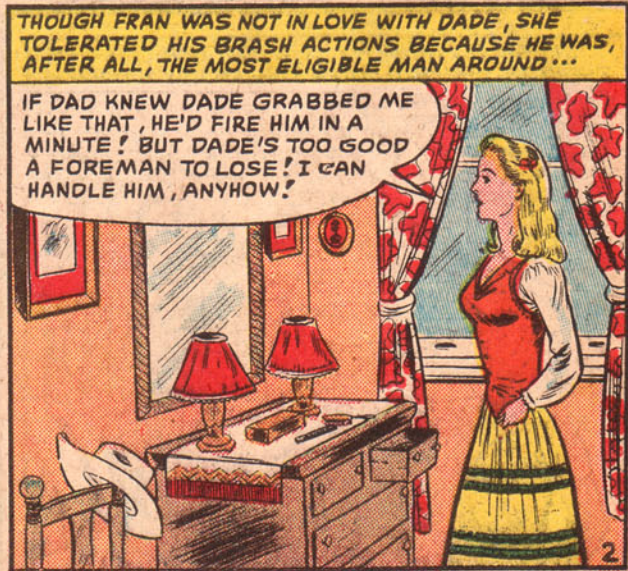
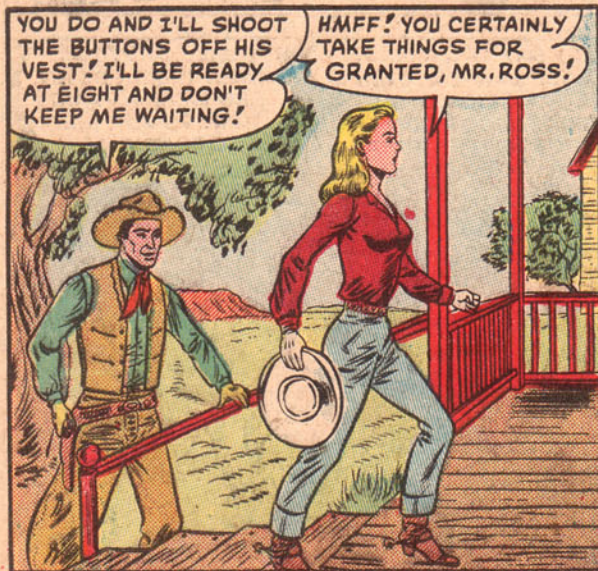
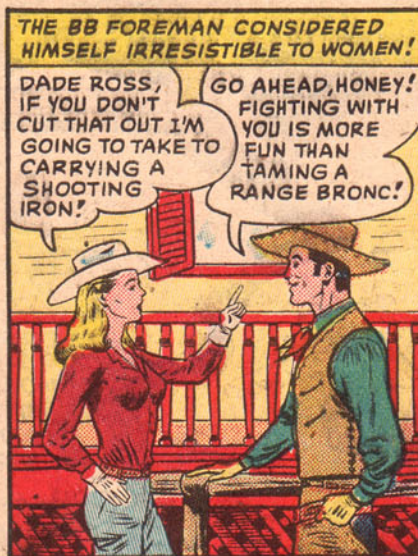
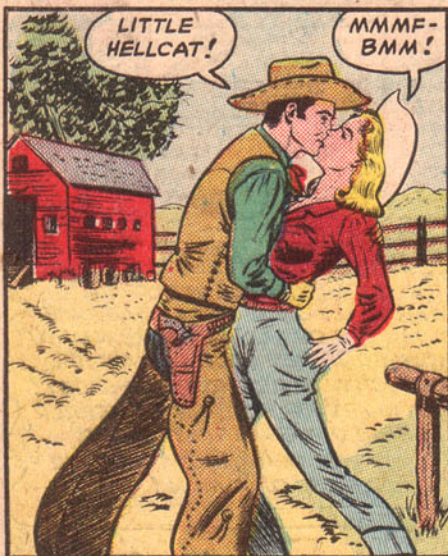
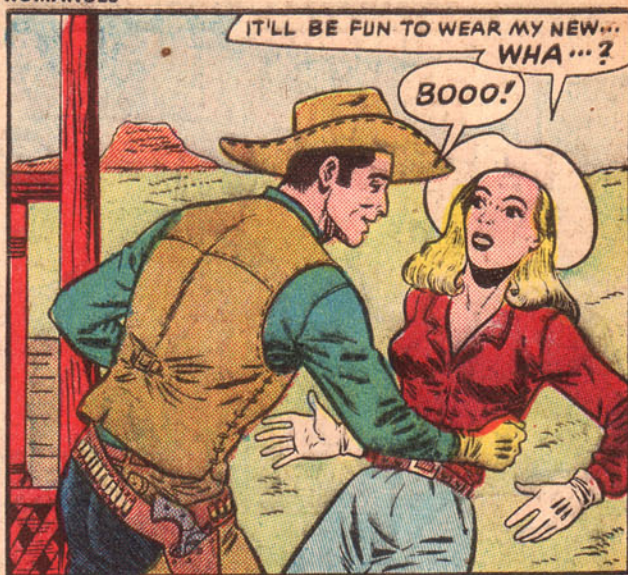
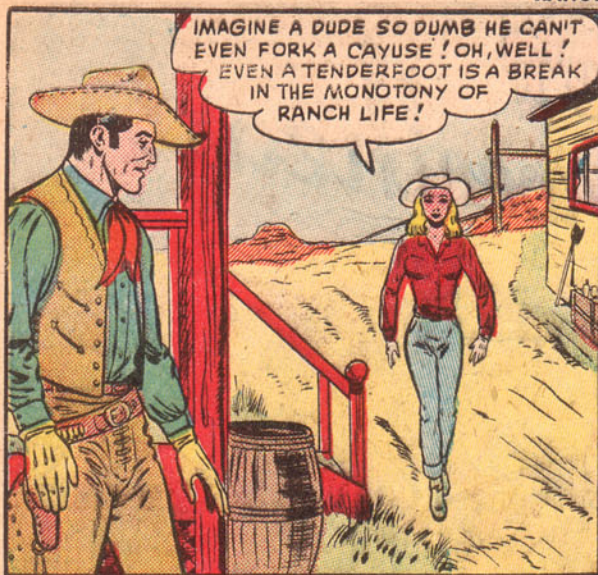
WHY, DAD, HOW COME YOU AREN'T RIDING HORSE-BACK? I THOUGHT YOU HATED A BUGGY!

I DO, FRAN, BUT I'M BRINGING BACK A DUDE WHO CAN'T RIDE! THE NEW LAWYER FROM THE EAST, RON BOYCE, IS COMING OUT TO SUPPER!

THEY SAY HE'S A FIRST CLASS LAWYER, EVEN IF HE IS A COMPLETE TENDERFOOT! HAVE A GOOD SUPPER READY FOR US, HON!

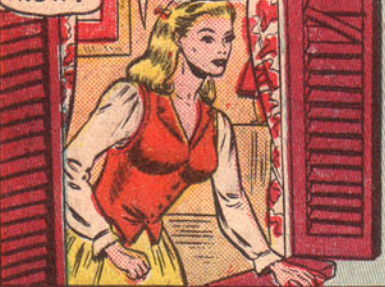
I WILL, DAD! I'LL EVEN BREAK DOWN AND WEAR MY PARTY DRESS FOR THE OCCASION!





WHO CAN BLAME A GIRL FOR ROMANTIC DREAMS WHEN SHE LIVES FAR FROM TOWN, FAR FROM MEN OF HER AGE AND INTERESTS!

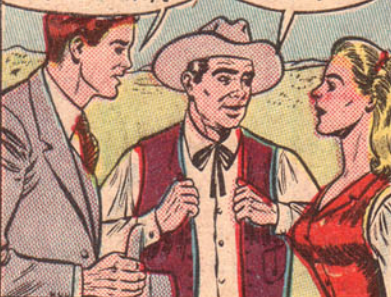
WOULDN'T IT BE WONDERFUL IF THIS RON BOYCE TURNED OUT TO BE YOUNG AND HANDSOME? BUT HE'S PROBABLY FIFTY AND MARRIED! OH-OH! HERE COMES DADDY'S BUGGY NOW!



A FEW MOMENTS LATER FRAN WAS LOOKING INTO WARM BLUE EYES, FEELING A NEW AND SURGING BEAT TAKE OVER THE RHYTHM OF HER HEART!

MISS BARLOWE, THIS IS INDEED A PLEASURE! I HAD NO IDEA SUCH FLOWERS BLOOMED IN THIS DRY COUNTRY!

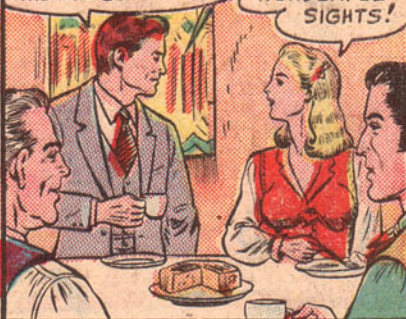
DON'T MIND RON, HONEY! I'VE DISCOVERED ALL HE DOES IS READ BOOKS! IT'S NO WONDER HE TALKS LIKE ONE!



THROUGH DINNER FRAN FOUND HERSELF COMPLETELY UNDER THE SPELL OF RON'S COURTELY MANNER AND VIBRANT VOICE! DAD SEETHED WITH ANGER!

OH, YES, THE LAST TIME I WAS AT BARNUM'S MUSEUM IN NEW YORK, I SAW GENERAL TOM THUMB, THE MIDGET!

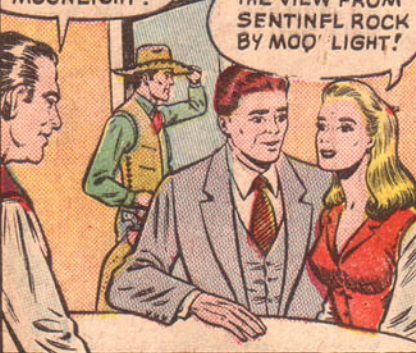
HOW EXCITING! I WONDER IF I'LL EVER SEE THE BIG CITIES AND ALL THOSE WONDERFUL SIGHTS!



OLD TOM BARLOWE WAS AN UNDERSTANDING SOUL... AND HE APPROVED OF HIS DAUGHTER'S INTEREST IN THE YOUNG, CULTURED EASTERNER...

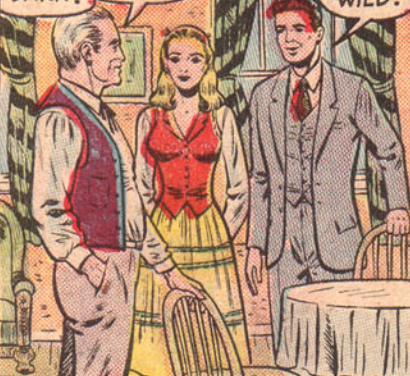
RON'S STAYING OVER TONIGHT, HONEY! WHY NOT SHOW HIM THE SPREAD BY MOONLIGHT?

A GOOD IDEA, DAD! NONE OF HIS SIGHTS CAN EQUAL THE VIEW FROM SENTINEL ROCK BY MOONLIGHT!



BETTER SKIP THAT PART TONIGHT, FRAN! THERE'S A BIG MOUNTAIN LION PROWLING AROUND AND HE'S NOBODY TO MEET IN THE DARK!

BRRR! I KNEW THEY CALLED THIS THE WILD WEST, BUT I HAD NO IDEA IT WAS THAT WILD!



AS THEY STROLLED AROUND THE BIG RANCH, A SHADOW DRIFTED AFTER THEM... A SPECTRE OF VENGEFUL ANGER!

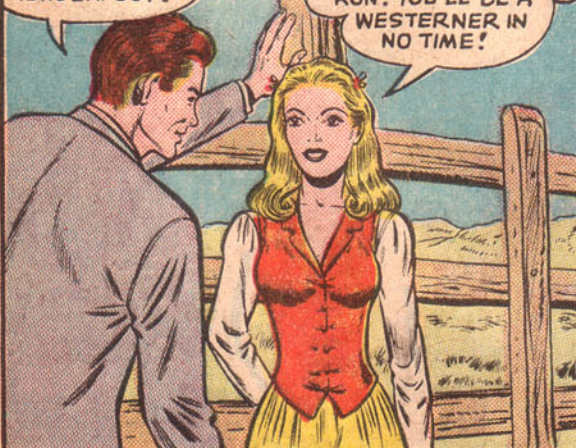
IS IT REALLY TRUE YOU CAN'T RIDE A HORSE, RON?

I'M AFRAID IT IS, FRAN... BUT I MEAN TO LEARN! I WANT TO DO EVERYTHING YOU EXPECT OF A MAN! IT'S SUDDENLY BECOME IMPORTANT TO ME!



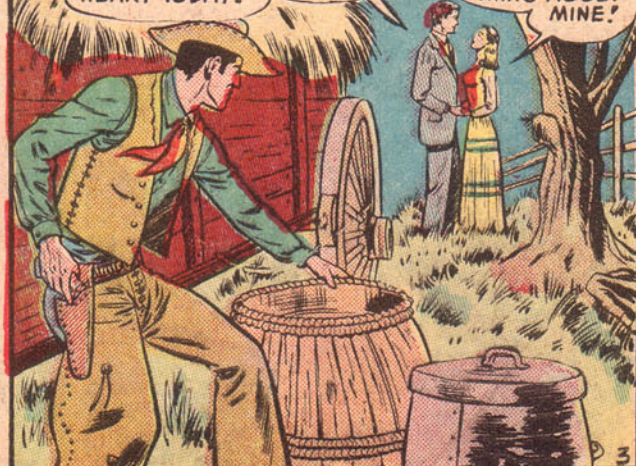
THERE'S A BARN DANCE TOMORROW NIGHT, FRAN! WOULD YOU CONSIDER GOING WITH A TENDERFOOT?

OF COURSE I WOULD! AND TOMORROW MORNING I'LL GIVE YOU A RIDING LESSON, RON! YOU'LL BE A WESTERNER IN NO TIME!



AND WHEN I AM, I'LL BE BOLD ENOUGH TO TELL YOU SOMETHING I'VE DISCOVERED ABOUT MY HEART TODAY!

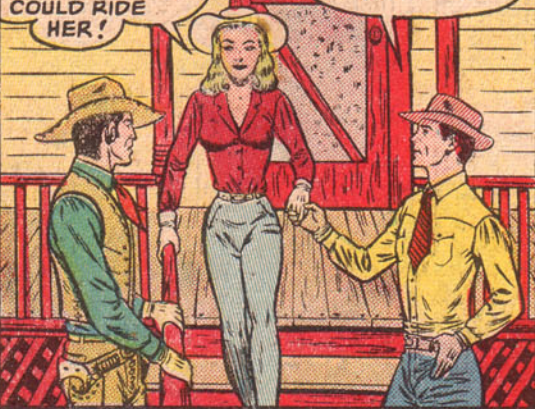
AND WHEN YOU DO, I MIGHT TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT MINE!



AFTER A NIGHT FILLED WITH GOLDEN DREAMS, FRAN GOT RON AWAY FROM HER FATHER'S BUSINESS QUICKLY!

BRING UP OLD BELLE FOR RON, DADE! SHE'S AS GENTLE AS A LAMB! ANYBODY COULD RIDE HER!

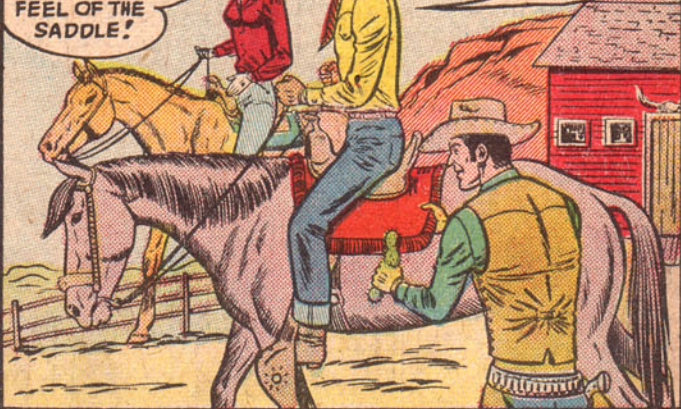
I HOPE SO, FRAN! I'D HATE TO MAKE A COMPLETE FOOL OF MYSELF IN FRONT OF YOU!



TO DADE, SEETHING WITH JEALOUS FURY, THE OPPORTUNITY FOR VENGEANCE AND A PRACTICAL JOKE WAS TOO GOOD TO OVERLOOK!

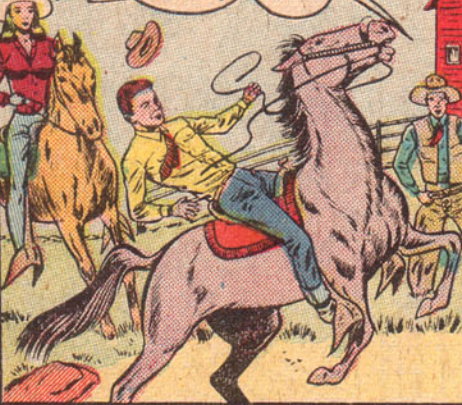
WE'LL WALK THE HORSES A BIT, RON! THAT'LL GIVE YOU THE FEEL OF THE SADDLE!

I'LL PROBABLY FEEL THE SADDLE LONG AFTER I LEAVE THE HORSE!



THE SHARP SPINES OF THE CACTUS UNDER THE SADDLE PAD SPURRED THE ANCIENT NAG TO A SUDDEN JUMP!

EEOOWW! RON! FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE! HO-HO-HO!



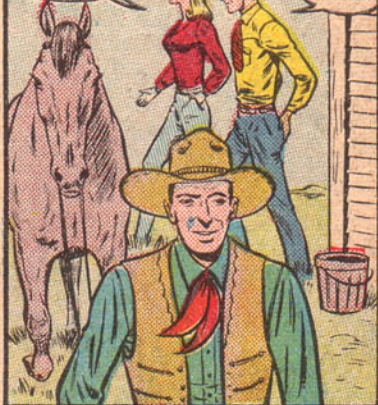
I HAVE TO HAND IT TO YOU, TENDERFOOT! I THOUGHT NOBODY COULD FALL OFF OLD BELLE... BUT YOU BROKE THE RECORD!

THAT WASN'T MUCH OF A START, WAS IT?



WE'D BETTER WALK THIS MORNING! THERE'S NO SENSE CRIPPLING YOU ON YOUR FIRST LESSON!

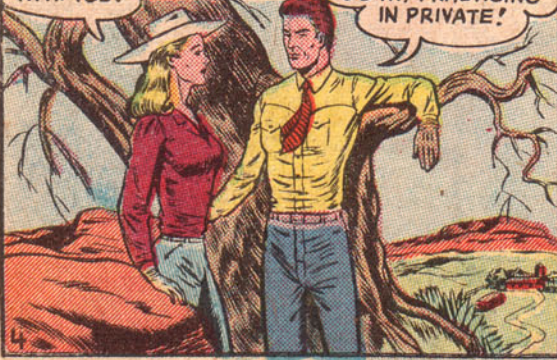
I'M SORRY, FRAN! I GUESS I DIDN'T SHOW UP LIKE MUCH THAT TIME!



BUT THE WALK WAS NOT A SUCCESS! THE MEMORY OF DADE'S RAUCOUS LAUGHTER AND RON SPRAWLED IGNOMINIOUSLY IN THE DUST SPOILED THE MORNING!

OH, LET'S GO BACK! I DON'T FEEL LIKE STROLLING! DAD WILL WANT TO DISCUSS LEGAL BUSINESS WITH YOU!

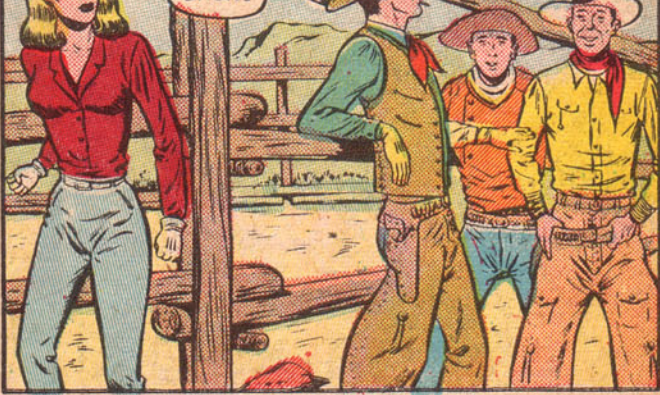
ALL RIGHT, FRAN! I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL! HEREAFTER, I'LL DO MY PRACTICING IN PRIVATE!



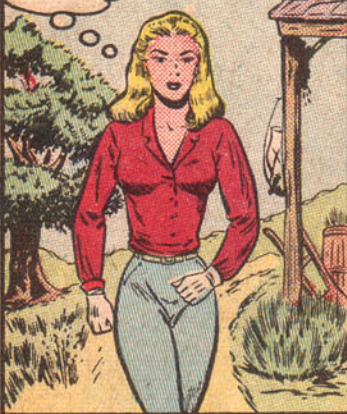
BACK AT THE RANCH, FRAN'S HURT PRIDE TOOK ANOTHER JOLT!

IT WAS THE FUNNIEST THING YOU EVER SAW! OLD BELLE SWITCHED AT A FLY... AND DOWN WENT THE DUDE ON HIS BACK!

HAW-HAW-HAW! HE MUST BE WORSE'N AN OLD WOMAN!



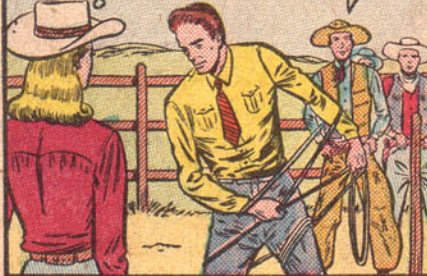
I'LL GO TO THE DANCE TONIGHT WITH RON, JUST TO SPITE DADE ... BUT I COULD NEVER LOVE ANYBODY AS AWKWARD AND DUMB AS THAT ABOUT COMMON, EVERYDAY THINGS!



DADE MISSED NO OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE RON LOOK FOOLISH! A LITTLE LATER, DRAWN BY GUFFAWS OF MOCKING LAUGHTER ...

ULP! NOW HE'S TRYING TO LASSO A SNUBBING POST... AND HE CAN'T EVEN DO THAT WITHOUT GETTING TANGLED UP!

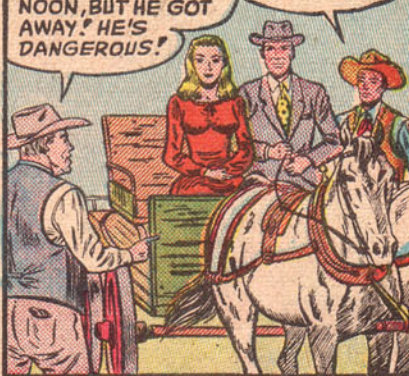
HO-HO-HO! YOU BETTER GIVE UP, TENDERFOOT, AND STICK TO YOUR LAW BOOKS! LEAVE THE RIDING AND ROPING TO MEN!



WITH THE COMING OF EVENING, FRAN GOT READY FOR THE BARN DANCE ...

BETTER WATCH YOURSELVES! QUILL WOUNDED THAT MOUNTAIN LION NEAR THE BAR Y THIS AFTER-NOON, BUT HE GOT AWAY. HE'S DANGEROUS!

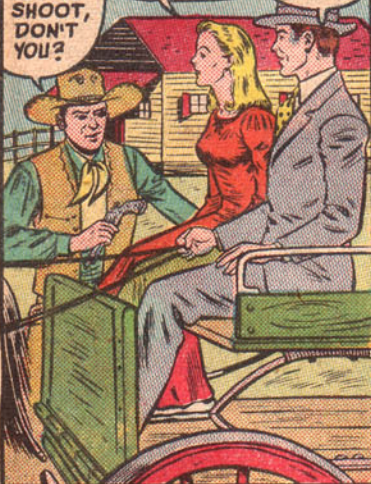
BETTER TAKE A GUN, TENDER-FOOT! YOU CAN'T TELL WHERE THAT VARMIN'T IS HIDING!



YOU KNOW HOW TO SHOOT, DON'T YOU?

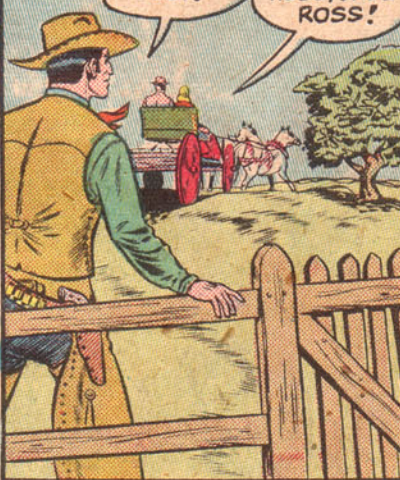
OH, LET'S GET STARTED!

I...I NEVER TRIED!



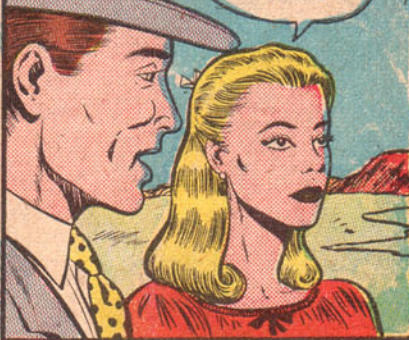
DON'T FALL OUT OF THE BUGGY, TENDER-FOOT!

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, DADE ROSS!



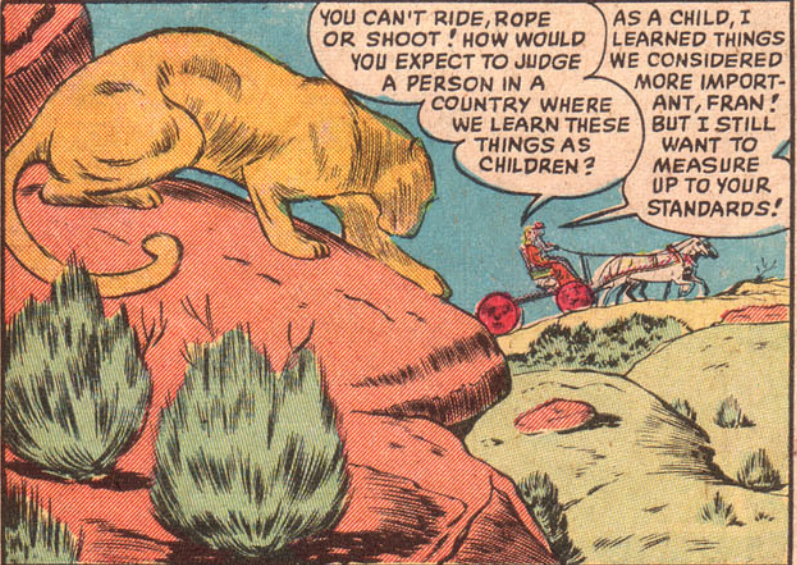
YOU'RE DISGUSTED WITH ME, AREN'T YOU, FRAN? YOU JUDGE A MAN BY WHAT HE DOES IN YOUR LINE ... NOT HIS!

OH, LET'S NOT HARP ON IT, RON! AND FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, TRY NOT TO MAKE ME LOOK RIDICULOUS BEFORE THESE PEOPLE TO-NIGHT!



YOU CAN'T RIDE, ROPE OR SHOOT! HOW WOULD YOU EXPECT TO JUDGE A PERSON IN A COUNTRY WHERE WE LEARN THESE THINGS AS CHILDREN?

AS A CHILD, I LEARNED THINGS WE CONSIDERED MORE IMPORTANT, FRAN! BUT I STILL WANT TO MEASURE UP TO YOUR STANDARDS!



MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE ON EARTH, FRAN... I WANT YOUR RESPECT AND A PLACE IN YOUR HEART! YOU SEE, I'VE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH YOU!

OH, RON, I'M ALL CONFUSED! YOU STIRRED MY HEART SO... AND THEN YOU MADE ME RIDICULOUS! I DON'T KNOW HOW I FEEL NOW!



IF IT WERE ANYWHERE ELSE, RON, I WOULDN'T MIND! BUT OUT HERE YOU'RE JUDGED BY EVERYONE!

FRAN, DEAREST, IF YOU'LL TELL ME I HAVE ANY CHANCE AT ALL, I'LL MAKE MYSELF THE BEST RIDER AND ROPER IN THE WEST



BUT DADE, OBSESSED WITH HIS JEALOUSY, IS UNAWARE THAT ANOTHER FIGURE OF FURY STALKS THE NIGHT... AND THE WIND KEEPS THE SCENT FROM HIS HORSE!

SNEAKING, LILY-LIVERED TENDERFOOT! I'LL PUT A SLUG THROUGH THAT FANCY HAT OF HIS AND SEE HOW LONG HE HANGS AROUND, MAKING TALK!



HE WON'T STOP RUNNING FOR... WHA...?



LIKE A JUGGERNAUT OF FURY, THE WOUNDED, PAIN-MADDENED MOUNTAIN-LION STRIKES!

YIII! HELP!

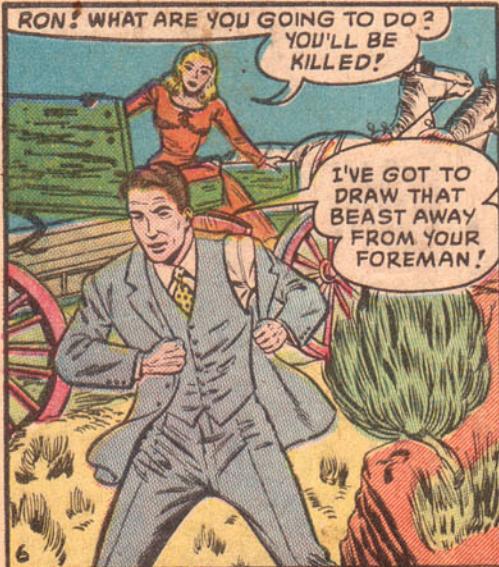


THE MOUNTAIN LION! IT'S GOT DADE!

STAY HERE! BE READY TO CLEAR OUT IF IT TRIES TO ATTACK YOU!

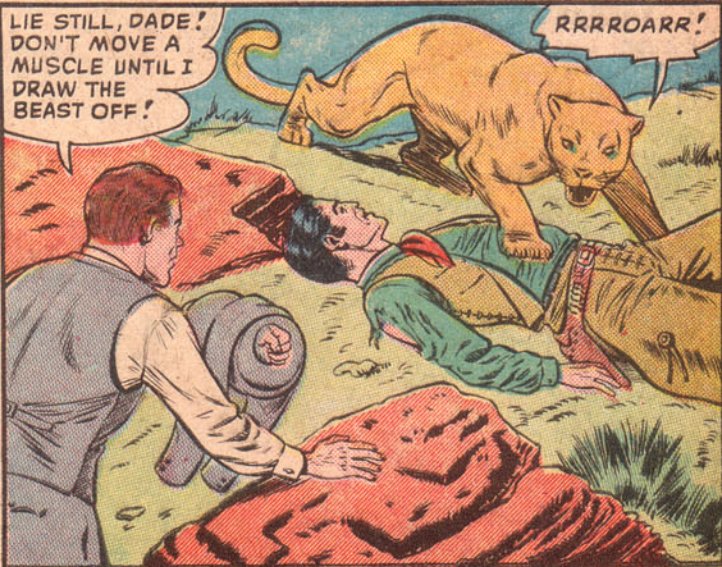


RON! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? YOU'LL BE KILLED!

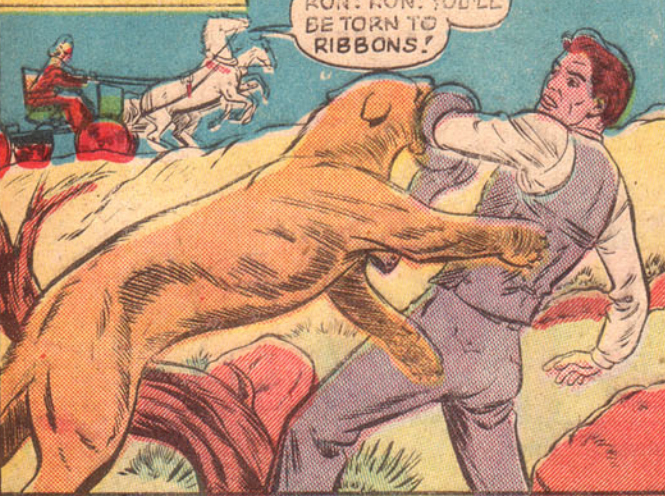


LIE STILL, DADE! DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE UNTIL I DRAW THE BEAST OFF!

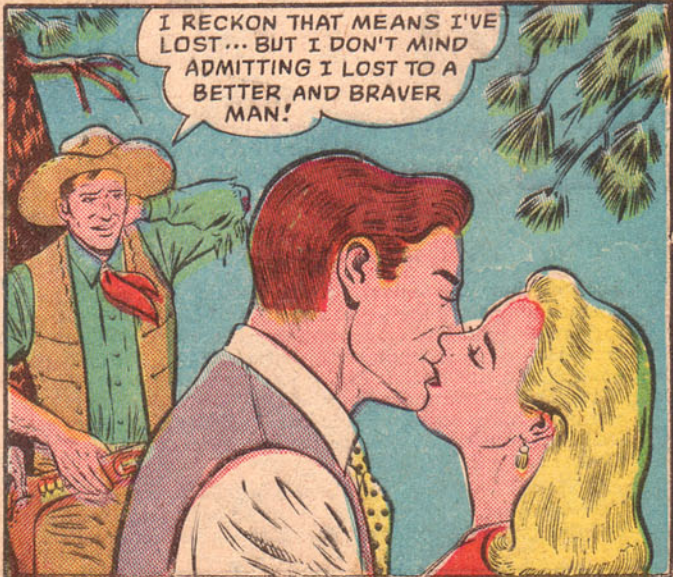
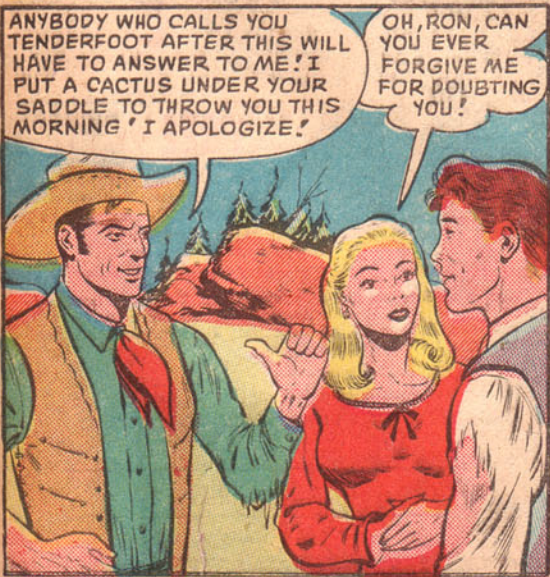
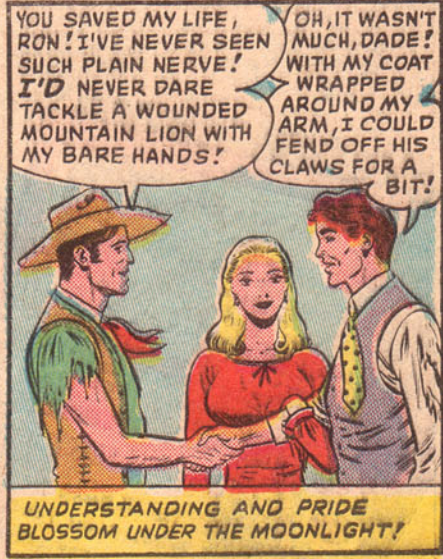
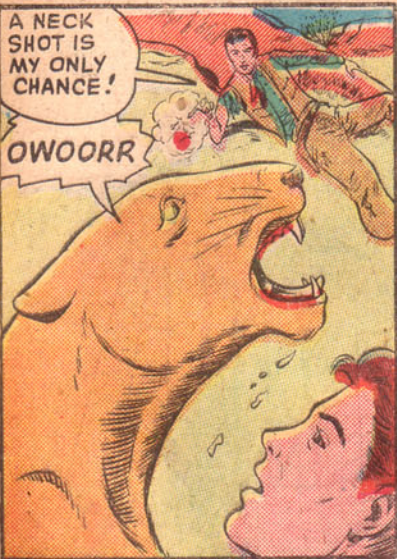
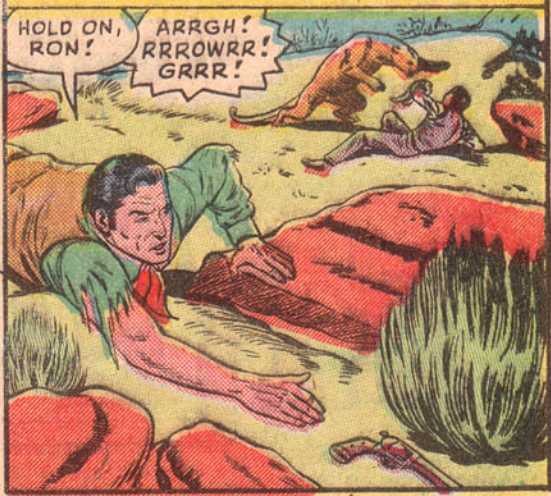
RRRROARR!



WITH A COUGHING ROAR THE GREAT BEAST STRUCK THE UNARMED RON, WHILE FRAN FOUGHT TO QUIET THE TERRIFIED TEAM!



THOUGH BADLY HURT, DADE HAD THE STRENGTH TO CRAWL TOWARD HIS OWN GUN, DROPPED WHEN THE LION STRUCK HIM!



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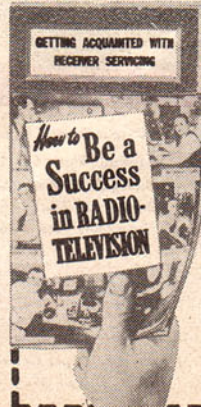
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